

Problems with Strieber and *The Key*

HEINRICH MOLTKE



ABSTRACT

THE KEY by Whitley Strieber presents a conversation Strieber claims to have had with an otherworldly visitor offering a “new vision” of God and man along with previously unknown scientific knowledge and predictions for the future. This article critically examines *The Key* and uses textual evidence from Strieber’s previous books, articles, and interviews to show that ideas purportedly originating with the visitor appear throughout Strieber’s previous work. This article notes that scientific assertions made in *The Key*, far from being new and unknown, draw on the popular scientific literature at around the time Strieber wrote *The Key*. This article also examines the controversy surrounding differences between *The Key*’s two published versions, suggesting that contrary to Strieber’s improbable claim that his 2001 text had been altered by “sinister forces” without his knowledge, Strieber authored the text of both editions. Strieber’s inability to notice the similarity between his own public statements and the “breathtakingly new” ideas presented by his visitor combined with his unsupportable charge of censorship against his own self-published book call into question his credibility as a bridge between intellectual culture and the experience of the otherworldly.



Page numbers in parentheses () refer to the 2001 Walker & Collier edition of *The Key* unless otherwise noted.

Numbers in superscript with brackets [] link to end notes.

Quotations from digital texts are *sic erat scriptum*.

© 2017 The Empty Man Ltd

VERSION 1.05

PART ONE

THE KEY was self-published by Whitley Strieber listing his company, Walker & Collier, Inc., as the copyright holder.^[1] Whitehall Printing Company in Naples, Florida was used as printer.^[2] The book was available for purchase starting in January 2001^[3] at Strieber's website, whitleysworld.com, and could be ordered by telephone.^[4]

A slim volume, *The Key* was 105 pages in length. The book consisted of four sections: *The Master of the Key*, *The Conversation*, *Who Was He?*, and *The Prophecy of the Key*. Of these, *The Conversation* contained what according to Strieber was a faithful transcription of a dialogue with an otherworldly visitor dubbed by Strieber the 'Master of the Key'. *The Conversation* formed the main substance of the book at sixty-two pages long and nearly twenty thousand words. Two other sections, *The Master of the Key* and *Who Was He?* described what took place before and after the dialogue according to Strieber. *The Prophecy of the Key* was a set of glosses by Strieber on twenty or so excerpts from *The Conversation*.

THE SCENARIO

ACCORDING to Strieber in *The Master of the Key*, in the early morning hours of June 6, 1998 (a Saturday),^[5] while on an author tour in Toronto and staying at the Delta Chelsea Hotel, a knock awoke him from a "deep sleep" (3). Confused and thinking it room service, Strieber went to the door and a man let himself into the room. At first ready to eject the man, Strieber in the course of a brief exchange became intrigued. Strieber would call the dialogue that followed "the most incredible conversation of my life"^[6] and call Master of the Key an "awesome" and "extraordinary man",^[7] "the most brilliant person I have ever met"^[8] with "the best mind I have ever encountered" (6).

The ideas the Master of the Key presented Strieber with were "totally new and original",^[9] "deeply, profoundly new" (6), and "breath-takingly new" (5). There was a "soaring sense of newness" (79) to the ideas which according to Strieber were "unlike anything I had heard before".^[10] The ideas involved a "completely new view of man and God",^[11] a "new image of God" (6,7) that "lifted the veil between life and death" (7) by explaining "what the soul actually is and how death works".^[12]

The encounter seemed to last “about half an hour”. But according to Strieber “once our conversation was transcribed, it became obvious that more time was involved. He must have been with me for at least two hours” (5). The next morning, Strieber found that he had notes from the conversation which he had taken down in a yellow pad. By December 2000, Strieber had “transcribed” the conversation^[13] calling the process “the most difficult writing struggle of my life” (7). The transcription would form the basic substance of *The Key*, a book that Strieber would call the “most important thing I have ever published”,^[14] saying in 2001: “I think it contains more of value than everything else I’ve written all put together”,^[15] and in 2003 “this is probably the most important book I’ve ever had the privilege of writing” and “[t]his is my great work. This is probably why I was born”.^[16] Strieber would even say of *The Key* in 2011: “I regard this as a sacred text”.^[17]

EVERYTHING HE SAID WAS NEW

IT WAS FORTUNATE for Strieber that he took notes. The notes were “not extensive”, but they had a “mnemonic power” (5) that allowed him to recreate what was said. Indeed, according to Strieber in 2001, *The Conversation* is “eighty to ninety percent accurate”.^[18] Strieber has maintained since its publication that *The Conversation* is a transcription of a conversation and not a fictional creation,^[19] and over time his confidence in its accuracy appears only to have increased, saying in 2011 that the transcription was “easily ninety percent accurate, maybe more”.^[20]

The Key certainly differed from Strieber’s previously published work. Strieber’s close encounter books were first-person narratives featuring gripping novelistic descriptions weakened by sometimes too-poetic ruminations and sprinkled here and there with occasional brilliant ideas. *The Key* took the form of a conversation, resembling a philosophical dialogue inasmuch as the “new vision” of the Master of the Key seemed to reflect a sophisticated and coherent system.^[21] Unlike many philosophical dialogues, *The Key* is also successful as a literary creation. It effectively dramatizes a conversation with a real and possibly exceptional person. Strieber comes across as curious, out of his depth, and sometimes deeply moved, and there is a palpable tension as he tries to elicit answers from the Master of the Key. For his part, the Master of the Key speaks with a language that is compact and technical, but also evocative and poetic. Sometimes he refuses to answer questions put to him, and sometimes

he answers questions from an unexpected direction. His answers can be allusive or wonderfully clear, even aphoristic: 'Being serves joy'; 'path within, signposts without'; 'in the fields, fear rides'. The reader gets the sense that the Master of the Key is someone who has much to say in a short amount of time.

The Conversation is thus not the laundry list of assertions one might expect from an author using an invented figure as a mouthpiece. A good deal is said by allusion or by implication and the exact meaning is not always clear. In addition, a natural flow is maintained throughout giving the transcription of the conversation a certain believability. If one did not reject *a priori* the whole premise of the encounter, statements made by the Master of the Key might well be taken to suggest a whole body of authentically real knowledge.

What did the Master of the Key figure say? At a glance, much of it — maybe even all of it — seems unheard of and new. Certainly none of it seems to reflect the prevailing orthodoxies of our day — as one again might expect of an established author championing private opinions.

The following is a trajectory through the main points presented in *The Conversation*.

KEY POINTS

1. **MANKIND** is destined to "ascend or go extinct" over the next two thousand years (68). The earth can no longer "support" Mankind owing to "overpopulation" (13) and depletion of natural resources (56). Man was meant to leave the earth by now but because the Holocaust killed too many of Mankind's "most intellectually competent members", the "secret of gravity" was not "unlocked" (13). At the same time, a great calendar called the Zodiac was created which very precisely measured the rate of growth and the amount of time it would take for Mankind to run out of resources (56). Different ages mark different stages in Man's evolution, and in the coming Age of Aquarius, Mankind must "surrender" (to God) and "return to the forest" or go extinct (43). Surrender and returning to the forest coincide with spiritual ascension since ego or self-will are what stand in the way of ascension (28), and ascension itself is a function of an evolutionary process in which the energetic body grows through the natural accumulation of lived experience (27), as souls are recycled into other bodies with deep dispositions (soul's conscience, 74) and knowledge of past lives buried (33, 42).

2. THE UNIVERSE is elemental and energetic (29), with ‘elemental’ corresponding roughly to the physical, i.e. the periodic table of the elements (15).^[22] The energetic covers a spectrum starting with unconscious energy, then conscious energy, which moves in the direction of radiance (15) the higher its spin and the greater its complexity (17). Conscious energy is something like unconscious energy brought to bear on itself (it “knows itself”, 63) which is a sufficient leap in complexity and intensity that it is qualitatively different. The more intense, the more complex the more encompassing it is, the more it becomes radiant, until it reaches ecstasy, which is the complete union of one with all. Ecstasy has no upper limit (29), more and more ecstasy always being possible.

3. THE UNION OF ONE WITH ALL THINGS is possible by virtue of the universe’s holographic holism. Each part contains the whole and even God is a hologram, God being another name for the whole. However, the degree to which this unity is known and enjoyed is the degree to which one is conscious in the energetic world. The ‘radiant body’ is the name for the part of us that is conscious in that world (42). Ordinary consciousness is able to access the radiant body through a series of techniques including meditation in which through practice one brings consciousness to bear on the energetic, i.e. objective sensation. This slow feedback loop, by duplicating and expanding upon the initial jump that brought about consciousness to begin with, increases the spin and complexity of the consciousness in question, i.e. its radiant body, allowing for more brushes with holistic information about the All (“You may haunt God”, 20) thanks to superposition.

4. THE CHANGES that occur energetically when consciousness is brought to bear on itself using, for example, the power of attention can sufficiently alter and even strengthen that consciousness and its own energetic substratum so that it can cohere after the death of the physical body. Without meditation, what survives of the energetic body is fragmentary, memories without someone to remember them or weak and partial personalities that haunt the places of their former selves. The dead see and hear everything that occurs in the world of the living. The barrier between the living and the dead is a shibboleth. The same goes for the natural and the supernatural in general; there is only one order of Nature if science would but recognize it.

5. **TWO THOUSAND YEARS** of evolutionary pressures await mankind. Rapid climate change will climax in a sudden ice age counter-intuitively brought about through human-aided global warming. The melting of the polar ice cap will drive the north Atlantic current south resulting in a massive atmospheric upheaval producing hemispheric superstorms that will leave much of the northern hemisphere buried under snow long after winter has ended (the new ice age). Worldwide famine will result, and human population will be greatly reduced. Whether man goes extinct will depend on the extent he 'surrenders', but also whether he is able to construct an artificial intelligence smart enough to predict sudden severe weather quickly enough that he can stay ahead of it and protect himself. Such machine intelligence can be built using the gas nitrous oxide which will "bear memory" (64). This machine intelligence might become conscious bringing its own dangers.

6. **NATURALISM** of a sort broader than science currently can conceive awaits mankind's discovery over the next two thousand years ("There is no supernatural [...] only the natural world", 15). Phenomena previously considered supernatural will become accessible to science, though the ability of science to greet these phenomena and gain knowledge about them is a function of mankind's overall spiritual development (22). Mankind will learn that there is a "science of the soul" (40), that even God can be measured (51). The universe is populated by all sorts of life (46), energetic and elemental, and even sin is given a naturalistic definition (the denial of the "right to thrive", 74). Likewise, consistent with the expanded natural order, if Man 'surrenders', laying a firm foundation in the radiant body in his 'return to the forest', he will survive past the end of the coming age and spread into the universe. If not, mankind will enter the "world of the dead" (41), waiting for new bodies to evolve that the souls of mankind may or may not be able to inhabit (30).

THE KEY TEN YEARS LATER

IN JUNE 2010 a short statement appeared on the Scovil Galen Ghosh Literary Agency website saying that *The Key* had been acquired by Mitch Horowitz at Tarcher in a "very nice deal".^[23]

On November 26, 2010, just over a month before the ten-year anniversary of the first publication of *The Key*, the announcement was made on Strieber's website unknowncountry.com that *The Key* was being

re-released by Tarcher/Penguin:

The Key will be published by Tarcher Penguin in April, at which point we will phase out our original edition. This means that copies of *The Key* will become valuable collectors' editions in the future, so they make great gift now, that will only appreciate in the future. ^[24]

On December 13, 2010, an official announcement was likewise made at the Tarcher website.^[25] The book now had a new subtitle, *The Key: A True Encounter*, mirroring the subtitle of Strieber's famous bestseller, *Communion: A True Story*.

On January 24, 2011, Strieber in his online blog *Whitley's Journal* called the upcoming Tarcher a "revised version" of *The Key*:

I will publish three books in 2011. In April my novel *Hybrids* will be published, as will the revised version of *the Key*.

Confusingly, despite calling it a revision, Strieber also wrote that the conversation itself would not be changed:

The core material of the Key, the conversation with the Master of the Key, remains unchanged, but there has been an incredible amount of scientific corroboration for what he said since we published our edition of the book. There really cannot be any question, now, that he was a truly remarkable individual, and I detail in the new introduction and afterword just how even his seemingly improbable predictions have turned out to be based on solid science.^[26]

The book was available for purchase in paperback and as an e-book from its official date of publication, May 12, 2011.^[27] An audiobook version was available from May 24, 2011.^[28]

At 256 pages, the Tarcher contained all four of the main sections in the Walker & Collier edition. There were some differences as well:

❗ **a new dedication:** the new 2011 version was dedicated to Strieber's wife, Anne, saying "without her insistence, it would have been neither written nor published". The 2001 Walker & Collier had been dedicated to "the prophet Daniel,

and the great vision he left for our time”

- ❧ a new *Introduction*
- ❧ a new section called *Fragmentary Inclusions* with dialogue material Strieber could not fit into *The Conversation*
- ❧ a new *Afterword*
- ❧ an *Appendix* in which Strieber explains why he included sections from the Walker & Collier and announced that the Walker & Collier was “retired”.

But the differences did not end there. To the surprise of many of Strieber’s fans, and to Strieber’s own intense consternation, the transcription of the conversation appearing in the Tarcher bore significant differences from the Walker & Collier’s. If *The Key* was a word-for-word transcription of a conversation that actually took place with someone who had access to unknown scientific knowledge and even to the divine — a man dispensing important truths to a mankind on the verge of extinction, why was there more than one version of what was said? What did the Master of the Key really say? How did what was not said get written? What followed was one of the most bizarre controversies involving an author’s relationship to his published work in recent times.

PART TWO

DIFFERENCES DISCOVERED

THE DISCOVERY of differences between the Walker & Collier version of *The Conversation* in *The Key* and the Tarcher version was made by the present author on the day of the latter’s release, May 12, 2011. Posting to Strieber’s Facebook page, I asked why changes had been made to the text of the 2001 edition.

Strieber responded, expressing surprise. According to Strieber, he had not altered the text, nor would he ever do so. I put together a short list of some two dozen differences noticed in a casual reading and sent them to Strieber by e-mail.

Strieber said he was shocked, and that he had contacted the publisher (Tarcher/Penguin) with the list of differences to get an explanation. Nevertheless, while being “mystified” by the changes, Strieber

held that:

They seem like small clarifications. None of them really change the meaning of the dialogue, but the fact that they exist at all is as peculiar as it is interesting. Not only that, the oddest part for me is that the new versions seem more familiar to me than the ones in the original edition. It's as if somebody has somehow corrected the book for accuracy.

At this point, Strieber felt that the Tarcher's differences from the original were "small clarifications" that were "more familiar" to him and presumably closer to his recollections than the text of the 2001 Walker & Collier. But Strieber's attitude toward the nature of the differences would soon change. First, in a subsequent e-mail, Strieber declared that he had found the 2011 Tarcher's "new versions" in his original manuscript.

I have found all of them, except the typo changes such as Moslem to Muslim, in the manuscript I sent the publisher.

Here is its history: After I finished it, I converted it into Page-maker and sent it to the printer, back in 2002.^[4] The Pagemaker version is exactly the same as the printed first edition. I then converted the original manuscript to PGP encoded format and sent it to my secure server, where it has remained all these years. After Tarcher bought it, I took the ms. off the server and removed the encoding. Then I sent it along to the publisher. As it could not have been changed--I thought--I did not compare it to the original book.

And yet, the changes are there. They were not made by the publisher. They were not made by me. Nobody but me has the key to the PGP file, so I really have no explanation for them.

Strieber names two source files: a Microsoft Word file (original manuscript) and a PageMaker file (formatted manuscript). According to Strieber, *The Conversation* was written in Microsoft Word and once "finished", the text was then formatted in Adobe PageMaker. Adobe PageMaker was a professional-level program used until 2004 by publishers to format a text for publication. A variety of decisions as to kerning, leading, page size are made in programs like PageMaker to prepare a text for the printing process.

According to Strieber, the PageMaker formatted version, which was “exactly the same as the printed first edition”, was sent to the printer (presumably as either a PageMaker file or as PDF). Then the “original manuscript” (MSWord file) was encrypted and put on his secure server for safekeeping. It was this file, Strieber claims, that was sent to Tarcher for the 2011 edition, without any changes being made by him or the publisher to its content.

In a reply sent on May 14, I expressed the view that the Tarcher did not read like a corrected or clarified edition. Rather, because of problems with the text that the Walker & Collier did not have, the Tarcher read as if its author had tinkered with it seeking to improve on it, ultimately weakening it. I highlighted three examples from the list previously sent:

- ❶ **an obvious continuity problem** in the Tarcher in which Strieber asks the Master of the Key to return to a topic that had not been discussed; the problem is not present in Walker & Collier
- ❷ **a clear instance** where an answer to a question in the Tarcher is confused and rambling in comparison to the Walker & Collier
- ❸ **a statement in Tarcher** to the effect that Strieber's purported implant was intended rather implausibly to *protect* him from mind control

Here Strieber's attitude about the differences seemed to undergo an abrupt and dramatic change. Instead of answering the points, Strieber took to his blog and posted an entry on May 15, 2011, with the title “The Old Edition of the Key was CENSORED, the New One is Not”.^[2]

In a brief final reply of May 16, Strieber summed up his new view of the differences:

If you look over the journal I wrote about it, the meaning of the alterations will become crystal clear. They were a very sinister and brilliant (and, for 10 years, successful) attempt to pervert and diminish critical parts of the dialogue.

The differences existed because the Walker & Collier — already in print for ten years — had been the victim of “sinister” alteration.

CENSORED*Whitley's Journal* – May 15, 2011:

A few days ago, an astute reader informed me that there were differences between the new edition of the Key and the one I published in 2002.

The 2002 edition, it turns out, was secretly censored by unknown parties. Crucial changes were made, that had the effect of obscuring and diminishing the message of the book. [...].

I provided Tarcher/Penguin with the same copy of the dialog between myself and the Master of the Key, dated November 16, 2000, that I used in the creation of the first edition.

My edition was changed by an unknown party. The current Tarcher edition reproduces the actual dialogue exactly, changing only a few typographical errors and misspellings. Thus the Tarcher edition contains the actual, correct dialog, while the one I published in 2002 does not.

The file that I sent to the printer of the original edition and to Tarcher is dated November 16, 2000. It was generated by converting the a Word file into PageMaker using the conventional process, which certainly wouldn't have led to the changes that appeared in the book.

At some point prior to being printed, the file was edited by somebody other than me, and the edits resulted in crucially important changes. When I got the proofs back from the printer, they corresponded with the original, but when the book was actually printed, changes had been made.

These changes are extremely subtle and brilliant. They were made by a skilled censor with a very definite agenda, which was to diminish the ways in which the dialogue offers empowerment to the reader.

Since the proofs were accurate, I did not think to check the finished books, and thus have been unwittingly selling the edited version for ten years.

I have to say that I am appalled and horrified by this, and extremely glad that the actual conversation, as I remember it, has finally been published.

I just thank God that the Tarcher edition contains the actual dialogue, as it was meant to be read. In a sense, therefore, the SECOND edition of the Key is really the first! [...]

THUS STRIEBER announced to his readers and to the world that his 2001 self-published book had been altered by “unknown parties” in a way that amounted to censorship. In the *Journal* piece, Strieber referred to an “original” Microsoft Word manuscript file on his computer dated November 16, 2000, to which he claimed the new Tarcher corresponded. He also gave a series of interpretations of certain differences between the texts of *The Conversation*. (Hereafter these differences will be termed ΔK.) Among the words Strieber would use to describe differences unique to the Walker & Collier: “extremely sinister”, “disturbing”, “very subtle”, “outrageous”, and “sickening”.

The sudden rejection of his own 2001 text as a product of censorship was as remarkable as it was inexplicable. But already a certain degree of confusion — perhaps obfuscation — was entering into Strieber’s account.

In claiming he sent the same file “to the printer of the original edition and to Tarcher”, Strieber was saying something hard to reconcile. According to his e-mail and his *Journal*, Strieber wrote the text in Microsoft Word. That text was then imported into Adobe PageMaker where it was formatted for publication. Would Strieber have sent a PageMaker file to Tarcher ten years later? Even assuming backwards compatibility with a ten-year-old file, the Tarcher would be a different size book with different fonts chosen, a different interior design, and so on — all decisions to be made by Tarcher’s designers. The normal thing would have been to send the Microsoft Word file to Tarcher for these reasons and more. Tarcher would probably have requested it. Yet even less likely is Strieber sending his Microsoft Word file to a printing company as the printing company could have done nothing with it (and if so why use PageMaker?). The statement seems to be simply false, especially since Strieber says he used PageMaker for the Walker & Collier and sent a decrypted Word file to Tarcher.

And what of the PageMaker file being “exactly the same as the printed first edition”? The *Journal* alleged that “at some point prior to printing” changes were made — this would have been post-PageMaker since the “proofs were accurate”. And if the proofs were “accurate”, for Strieber this meant that the proofs matched the Tarcher. But this contradicts what was said in the e-mail. If the changes — the Walker & Collier ΔK — were in the PageMaker file then they would have to be in the proofs. According to Strieber, they were not. Yet if the Walker & Collier ΔK were not in the PageMaker file, why did he say the PageMaker file was “exactly the same as the printed first edition”? Was it a mistake?

Strieber’s account was certainly confusing. And given the confusing

circumstances, one could certainly wonder why Strieber would denounce with a kind of desperate vehemence the text of his own Walker & Collier edition, calling a variety of often minor differences “extremely sinister”, “disturbing”, “very subtle”, “outrageous”, and “sickening”.

Was Strieber’s reaction because he believed he was the victim of sinister forces interfering in his getting out the important message of the Master of the Key, his life, and his writing career? Was it because differences between the versions of *The Conversation* led him to doubt the reality of his ‘true encounter’? Was he in an apparent panic because the existence of differences might harm the new attempt at a more commercial edition of the book?

One thing was certain whatever the confusion: Strieber favored the new Tarcher. He even favored it to the extent of obscuring at least one obvious problem with the 2011 text.

MINORITY REPORT

ON MAY 17, 2011, the present author posted an essay online in response to Strieber’s censorship claim and, in particular, to the set of interpretations that Strieber offered as proof the Walker & Collier had been ‘censored’. The essay gave alternate interpretations to the ones Strieber put forward, and took the view that because of flaws in the Tarcher, the Walker & Collier likely contained the more authoritative text.

The essay noted that when Strieber reproduced the list of major differences sent to him in his *Journal*, he had omitted the first and least favorable to the Tarcher. It was a basic continuity problem.

On page 23, the original 2001 Walker & Collier text reads as follows:

What do the dead look like?

The acts of life affect the appearance of the dead in every tiny detail. Everything is imprinted upon the soul, often in surprising ways. Most dead appear as innocent children, longing for sensual lives and hoping that a body will be sparked that fits them. Some are aware enough of radiant being to try to ascend, but they always drift back, or if they become lost, are returned to earth.

However, in the Tarcher the question is replaced by this statement: “You mentioned monsters in the world of the dead.”

This creates a problem. At this stage in the dialogue (barely ten pages into the Walker & Collier), there has been no mention of “monsters in the world of the dead” or anything like it. Moreover, in both versions just before the line in dispute there is the following from the Master of the Key:

We will return to that later. There is a question lingering in your eyes that you have not asked. Ask it now.

The Master of the Key is telling Strieber to ask a question he is thinking of which the Master of the Key can evidently detect. While in the Walker & Collier what follows is a question, in the Tarcher what follows is a non-sequitur non-question.

The essay discussed another less noticeable continuity problem:

What has this all got to do with resurrection?

The resurrected man is a consistent theme of the mythology that developed out of observations of a certain type of being, beginning with Osiris and ending with Christ. Fully conscious beings adept in this science can enable the radiant body to appear as an elemental body, so perfectly imprinted are its sensations on their energetic being.

The above exchange appears only in the Tarcher. It is dropped into a discussion of crop circles and why their reality is denied. In the Walker & Collier, the Master of the Key makes reference to “bodies”, to which Strieber asks in response in the Walker & Collier: “Is your body, right now, radiant?” The Tarcher interrupts this with the passage quoted above as another non-sequitur.

Discussing these problems and some of the differences, the essay also made two passing observations. First, it noted that Strieber had read aloud from disputed passages during his audio commentaries on *The Key*. Some seven different audio commentaries were made by Strieber starting in 2003 during which he read selected passages from *The Conversation* and discussed them. While reading from and discussing the ‘altered’ passages Strieber never signaled any problem.

Second, it noted that there were affinities in wording between text unique to the Tarcher and the section called *Fragmentary Inclusions* which appeared only in the new Tarcher edition.

Assuming that the *Fragmentary Inclusions* was left-out material

dating to when Strieber first wrote *The Key*, and supposing Strieber's claim that he sent Tarcher his Microsoft Word manuscript was true, the essay suggested that because of the weaknesses in the Tarcher — a text created before the PageMaker file — what we were seeing with Tarcher's *The Conversation* was probably an earlier stage of the writing process. The continuity problems and confused language were likely corrected in the PageMaker program when the book's author was able to better see what his book would look like in print. Very few authors, the essay imagined, would be able to resist the temptation to make improvements to their text while staring at it for hours on end formatting it.

All this, of course, would depend on Strieber's clear assertion that he had not altered *The Conversation* in any way for the upcoming 2011 Tarcher release.

DREAMLAND

STRIEBER took the unusual step of being interviewed as a guest on his own Dreamland program in a hastily arranged interview with guest host and bestselling conspiracy genre author, Jim Marrs.^[3] Strieber was emotional, particularly during the first half of the interview, and his state could be described as panicked and overwrought. He stumbled, for example, over whether the 2011 Tarcher was the “old” or the “new” edition. But he was insistent that the Tarcher reflected his authorial intent, and maintained he was “shocked” and “absolutely appalled” at the differences. Strieber also steadfastly denied what was slyly being remarked by some on his website that the censorship claim was being made in order to encourage readers who already owned the Walker & Collier to buy the new Tarcher, telling listeners “don't feel you need to buy the new book”.

Strieber continued with his characterization of the differences as “changes” that were “absolutely sinister”. According to Strieber, “a lot of powerful material was taken out” in a “detailed and thoughtful act of extremely sinister censorship” by someone who “understood *The Key* deeply” and who edited it in a way that he was “unlikely to pick up on it”. Strieber said that the alteration of his book was an effort at “dis-empowerment, that's what this damn thing was about” and “making it ugly”, and was:

one of the best, clearest windows into what these controllers

are concerned about that has ever come into existence, and it's extraordinary in that respect.

Discussing one difference in particular, Strieber said: "But you see how this made it ugly and stupid? And made him seem like an idiot? And made me seem like an idiot?"

Strieber took the present author to task over his *Minority Report* essay, saying:

He takes a completely different viewpoint about all this. He does not think that the two editions are necessarily, that the new edition, that the old edition was necessarily censored so much as improved and changed. Now I disagree with him completely for the reasons — he kind of glosses over these particular changes in order to make sure that he can make his case.

Strieber then went on to say that the present author:

does make a good point [...] and that is that the old edition still has great value even though some of the changes that are present in it seem to be diminishing it.

Nowhere in the *Minority Report*, of course, did its author suggest that any of the differences unique to the Walker & Collier diminished it. Indeed, the *Minority Report* article maintained that the Tarcher was inferior as a text because of problems like discontinuity and language that sounded like paraphrase of the 2001 Walker & Collier. The essay stated clearly that:

whatever the ultimate reasons for the differences between the two texts, it's possible to take the view that the 2001 edition admits a positive and meaningful interpretation, and that the Tarcher is a step backwards.

Strieber tried to address the major discontinuity problem with the "monsters in the world of the dead" brought up in the *Minority Report* essay, saying in the interview:

He also points out something I missed on the first go-round of this. On page 23 of the old edition, I asked him, "What do the

dead look like?” That wasn’t actually what I asked him. What I asked him was, “You mentioned monsters in the world of the dead”. Now here’s the thing. I remember asking him that question very clearly. But what I don’t remember — and it’s possible that this was a last-minute change by me. It could have been done. It could have been done before I sent it off after proofing it. Very easily. Because I wracked my brain for a long time trying to remember what he said about monsters in the world of the dead. I know he said something. But I just can’t capture it. I can capture it in images, but not in words. There were a lot of things that happened that night, sounds he made that I couldn’t interpret that seemed to be connected somehow to words — it was a real hyperdimensional experience in many ways, let me put it that way. But anyway, he mentions this. And he’s right. There is something... There are things from *The Key*, from that conversation that I don’t remember. I know there are. And that was one of them.

The problems with Strieber’s defense are evident. The statement “you mentioned monsters in the world of the dead” is a statement, not a question. But even regarding it broadly as a question and leaving this aside: as a defense the simple insistence that he remembered asking the non-question “very clearly” was weak. Strieber failed to mention in the interview that just prior in the dialogue the Master of the Key was telling Strieber to ask the “question lingering in [his] eyes” and that while the question in the Walker & Collier works perfectly the Tarcher does not.

Second, Strieber failed to realize during the interview that despite his assertion of remembering “very clearly” asking the question about “monsters in the world of the dead” and that this was one of the things Strieber had either forgotten or could not convey in words — *an answer is given in the Tarcher*. In other words, evidently he had *not* forgotten and an answer *was* intelligible. The Tarcher gives a response to the out-of-place “[y]ou mentioned monsters in the world in the dead”, and it happens to be the same response given in the Walker & Collier to a properly formed question — one that introduces no discontinuity and comes in response to the Master of the Key’s clear prompting to ask a question.

Without giving any of the points in favor of the Walker & Collier, Strieber seemed to sense that in this instance the Tarcher suffered

by comparison. So he went so far as to say that it was possible that the difference was a “last-minute change” by him. But the admission was quite incredible. How could it not raise the question of how many last-minute changes there might have been, while at the same time flatly contradicting the statement made at the start of the interview and elsewhere that he “did no changes whatsoever of any of the content”? All things considered when Strieber said he “wracked [his] brain for a long time trying to remember what he said about monsters in the world of the dead”, it could well be taken now to mean that he made the change in 2010/11 to conform to what he remembered of the event at that later date. The door was now wide open to wondering how much, if not all of the text unique to the Tarcher was done by Strieber in preparation for the new edition’s release.

Yet Strieber did not abandon the censorship scenario. He doubled down, proposing an e-mail hijack:

Someone after I read the original proof pages of *The Key* changed these pages between the time they were proofed and signed off on and they were printed.

It was a remarkable claim. Strieber’s earnestness and total conviction certainly made it sound to some of his listeners as if something was going on, though by the end of the interview Strieber was ruminating on parallel universes and ‘timeslips’ as if he himself were not so sure of what he was passionately trying to convince his audience. The positions he was taking were problematic in other ways. The *Minority Report* essay had mentioned that Strieber had read aloud some of the disputed passages when he did his audio commentaries on the 2001 book. Without referring to the essay, Strieber claimed the opposite during his Dreamland interview, saying he had been “unlucky” and “didn’t happen to hit on anything that was different” in the ten years the Walker & Collier version was available. But then later he added:

I didn’t see that in all those years. Or I may have seen it and I just—I may have even commented on it.

CHANGES

THE PRESENT AUTHOR'S second involvement in the controversy came in reaction to Strieber's appearance as guest on his Dreamland show. As noted Strieber misrepresented my views to his listeners, and also claimed that I had "[glossed] over" differences in *A Minority Report* to make the case that he misrepresented, namely that the differences taken as a whole did not look like censorship and that the Tarcher *Conversation* might have come from an earlier stage of the manuscript. Of course, to me it was exactly the other way round: Strieber had omitted a key difference in making his case to the public and was making a lot of heated and overwrought claims without any apparent basis. Strieber was also making statements that were simply untrue: for example, that in his audio commentaries on *The Key*, he had been "unlucky" and had never happened across any of the passages that were "censored". Strieber even contradicted himself, maintaining from the start of the controversy until the Dreamland program that there had been "no changes whatsoever of any of the content",^[4] but during the interview reversing himself, saying of one difference that "it's possible this was a last-minute change by me".^[5]

To test Strieber's censorship claim, a complete list of the differences between the two versions of *The Conversation* was needed. I compiled the list by doing a side-by-side comparison, and posted the list online attached to an essay called *Changes in The Key: A Short Essay on the Question of Censorship in the Texts*. (Hereafter *Changes*.) The essay identified eighteen clusters of differences between the Walker & Collier and the Tarcher versions, not counting punctuation differences or changes in spelling. The *Changes* essay concluded that:

Of the eighteen sets of changes described above, twelve fall into a category of 'undecidable/editorial'. Two represent instances of language similar or different to the 1st edition, but more confusing or less concise — these could be reshuffled into the editorial category, raising that number to fourteen. One is a clear mistake in the 2nd edition. One is an exchange inserted into the 2nd edition with no surrounding supporting context. One involves a clear removal of a concept. One is a concept (three-part) introduced in the 2011 edition.

At least two-thirds of the differences did not alter the meaning of

the text in a way that in even the most sympathetic reading suggested ‘censorship’, and the majority of the remaining differences seemed to favor the Walker & Collier. Thus in the essay's view a charge of censorship was impossible to sustain — at least in the way Strieber was making it; namely, by having insisted he had never made any changes to the dialogue.

The *Changes* essay also gave the details about Strieber reading aloud from Walker & Collier ΔK in his audio commentaries. It named three specific instances where Strieber had read disputed words aloud and given them full exegesis. There was never any sign of unease on Strieber's part as he commented on these passages, nor any hesitation or uncertainty as one might expect confronted with words that were not his own.

To show just how comfortable Strieber was with text he would allege in 2011 was inserted by “sinister forces”, here is Strieber giving his interpretation of one such passage in 2004:^[6]

A lot of time has passed since we last talked about *The Key*. [...] [2:25] Now, I look down at the text and where do I find myself? I find myself when I asked the question, “There are aliens here?” And the Master of the Key answered: “Some using you, some guiding you.”

What a perfect place to start again. Because I have literally in the past few weeks just had experience of suffering with somebody who is being used, and myself experiencing guidance of the most profound and important kind. [...]

In 2011, Strieber would say that the Walker & Collier's “some using you, some guiding you” was a product of censorship, that it was profoundly misleading because it painted a “lurid” picture of good aliens and evil aliens, while the 2011 Tarcher's “using you and guiding you” for being more nuanced and ambiguous was what the Master of the Key actually said. But in 2004 Strieber was able to read the Walker & Collier out loud without noticing any lurid alteration, and was able to discuss it in a way to suggest the text was valid and meaningful.

The same was true when a few minutes later Strieber happened upon another bit of disputed text. In the original Walker & Collier, the Master of the Key expands upon his statement about “some [aliens] using you, some guiding you”:

We're being exploited?

You are, and in some respects horribly, by the creatures of the dark. But you are also being helped. You are being guided to your place as guides of another world. (35)

In the Tarcher, the phrase “creatures of the dark” is absent:

We're being exploited?

You are, but also helped. You are being guided to your place as guides of another world.

In the 2004 audio commentary, Strieber read the Walker & Collier version above and had this to say of his experience hearing it:

[4:45] [T]his is really a big surprise. What, I thought, do you mean? I was fascinated by these statements. I know a lot about what the darkness is doing. The people in British Columbia recently, a lot of them had genetic material harvested from their bodies. Not just Cynthia and her friend. Other people reported to doctors with strange wounds that look like tissue sampling. Cattle are being mutilated and material is being taken from them. And probably some kind of horrific, vile genetic experimentation is going on. We're genetically very similar to cattle. Maybe they're trying to make a species that's an amalgam of us that would be as compliant as cattle and as smart as we are. In other words, somebody's out there trying to make slaves—who knows?

Do I care? Sure, I care. I'd like to see that not happen. Anybody would. But at the same time, I'm interested in concentrating on my relationship with what is out there that cares about us, that wants us to go on, and that has a plan for us that is of value to us. And there is that. That is definitely out there. I have no doubt about it at all.

He said “you are being guided to your place as guides to another world”. And this dovetails with a lot of material that has come to me in my experience. [...]

Thus Strieber is quite comfortable in 2004 with the idea that there are some aliens “using” or exploiting mankind and other aliens “guiding” mankind. According to Strieber these latter have a “plan for us that is of value to us”, and Strieber says he wants to focus on building

his relationship with them. As the *Changes* essay pointed out, Strieber not only failed to notice any problems with the Walker & Collier in this instance, he was able to deliver with conviction an interpretation of what the text meant.^[7] Yet in his 2011 *Journal* he was saying this:

The original transcript and current edition imply a consistency of policy among all aliens who are here, who are both using us and guiding us. The first edition suggests that different groups may have different motives — a skillful lie, I believe, intended to convert an empowering statement into one that will lead only to confusion. It strikes me as a small but extremely sinister edit.

The *Changes* essay noted that Strieber's erratic public presentation was now having the unintended effect of calling attention to other issues with *The Key*. For one, the physical description of the Master of the Key had not always been the same. In an early account, Strieber wrote of the Master of the Key that "he was short — maybe four and a half feet tall".

Finally, the *Changes* essay noted that in at least three cases, motifs in *The Conversation* already had a separate life in Strieber's body of material:

1. DEAD FOREVER. Between 2001 and 2011, Strieber told a story a number of times about a letter sent to him, one of thousands from people who had had strange experiences.^[8] The letter told of two people walking in the woods when they encountered a strange small man, who proceeded to tell them that he was a "rebel"; that there had been a great war in the distant past, apparently between earth and Mars, and that while Mars had lost, mankind (the aggressor) had been put to sleep and forced to reincarnate (i.e. the wheel of life). The assertions and the phrase "dead forever" appear in *The Key* (53–54), presented as fact.

2. MARS WAS MURDERED. This distinctive declaration is made by the Master of the Key (55–56). But elsewhere according to Strieber, it was the name of a thread on an internet discussion group he participated in back in the 1980s. The thread was devoted to the idea of the destruction of a past Martian civilization.^[9]

3. FALLEN WORLD. The Master of the Key declares that ours is a "fallen world" (14). Significantly, Strieber in other places tells an anecdote of an old priest who when Strieber was a child who used to say to him that ours is a "fallen world".^[10]

SINISTER FORCES

I have never been much of a conspiracy theorist, but I do think that there is a long-standing conspiracy against me, and I am worried about it. Just for the record, I am going to list some of the things that have happened that seem to me to be the result of attempts by sinister forces to sabotage my life. ^[11]

STRIEBER addressed none of the points made in the *Changes* essay in his next *Journal* dated May 26. Instead, he wrote of a long series of instances where he felt he had been the victim of an ongoing persecution, ranging from the failure of the film version of his book *Communion* to a variety of government-sponsored attacks. The occasion for all this was the problems surrounding *The Key*:

And now comes the censorship of the original edition of the Key. Incredible, and equally incredible that I didn't notice it at the time. What happened was that somebody very deftly edited the book after I had already signed off on it. Not only that, the edits, I have subsequently discovered, were actually in the proof pages I sent to the printer. So they happened when those pages were in my possession, but were not done by me. (I did a lot of editing to the proofs, but most of it was correcting typos and obscure phrases, etc.) For a more detailed discussion of what happened, read this journal entry. The 2011 Tarcher/Penguin edition currently available contains the original manuscript, as it was intended to be published. After I made this all public, I was dogged by people claiming that I had faked it all in order to sell books. How dare they. Insensitive, stupid swine--or people with a hidden agenda. There is even one person out there claiming that the "edits" make the book better. Sure, get rid of anything about mind control. Stick in things about evil aliens that don't exist to confuse people about who the sinister forces around here really are. That's great editing! The book was CENSORED.

The present author was now being lumped in with "sinister forces" out to "sabotage" Strieber's life. But two points of interest appear in the above on the matter of the differences. Strieber in this *Journal* was now claiming that: a) he made a number of edits to the "proofs"; and that b) the Walker & Collier ΔK showed up in those "proof pages". This

plainly contradicted what he said on Dreamland a few days before: that the proof sheets were “fine” and “correct”.^[12] So the point of failure in the process was becoming even less clear. In the Dreamland interview, Strieber speculated that the changes were made to the PageMaker file before it was opened by the printer thanks to an “e-mail hijack”. But now, the changes had been made after Strieber “had already signed off on it” but also in the proof pages (raising the obvious question of just what Strieber signed off on if not the content of the proof pages).

Strieber’s description here is deeply confused, and his level of confusion will be demonstrated further. But what was clear was that Strieber saw the differences between the two versions of *The Conversation* as another case of ongoing personal persecution:

I am sick and tired of all this. I don’t know what to do about it except make it public. There’s nothing I can do to stop it, but it has gone a long way toward ruining my life, and I think that it is just plain shameful. I have achieved something truly magnificent, which is coherent, focused contact with another level of reality. Instead of being honored for this, as I certainly deserve, I have been ostracized, demonized and hammered almost to a pulp. My books go completely unreviewed. It’s as if I’m dead, as far as the community of my literary peers is concerned. When I go to conventions, people I have known for years simply stare at me from a distance, afraid to show the slightest sign of recognition. Honest reviewers cannot in conscience trash my books, so they, also, remain silent. If I should ever write anything that they feel they can trash, God help me, I’ll be reviewed everywhere.

I’m tired of it and I want what I deserve from this society, recognition of the value of what I have done, not this continual sinister response. It is a dreadful way to treat anybody, let alone somebody who has worked as hard and as honestly as I have and has, in fact, created something that could be the basis for a new flowering of humanity, at a time when the powers that be have entirely failed and have betrayed the human race, and have no further reason to be respected in any way whatsoever.

COAST TO COAST AM

COAST TO COAST AM is a nationally syndicated late-night radio talk show that rose to prominence in the 1990s under broadcaster Art Bell. The show features guests who talk about the paranormal, extraterrestrials, alternative medicine, conspiracy theories, and more. Strieber was a frequent guest on the show in the 1990s, and even took over Art Bell's weekend radio show Dreamland, which Strieber continues to this day as an online podcast.

On June 19, 2011, Strieber appeared on Coast to Coast AM to promote his new book, *The Key*, with television reporter George Knapp as the program host. The three-hour appearance started in the show's second hour.

Strieber began the interview describing the basic scenario of his meeting with the Master of the Key. The host, George Knapp, was hardly adversarial. Yet Strieber's statements were those of a man subtly on the defensive, forestalling criticisms and preempting possible objections as best he could.

On the Master of the Key's appearance, Strieber said:

The man I met seemed pretty normal. He was there. He knocked on the door of a hotel room.

He was not unusual looking. I've described him in different ways, but he was short.

Strieber had, in fact, in the past described him many different ways as touched on in the *Changes* essay and as we shall see further. Anticipating the question of how he could reconstruct such a detailed conversation from a brief set of notes, Strieber said:

I can always pretty well put together, I've always been able to do this since I was in school. [...] I'm comfortable with that, and that's how I did it.

Over the years, Strieber's explanation as to how he could reconstruct a conversation from a brief set of notes had evolved. In the beginning, it was due to something intrinsic about the notes themselves. But by 2011, it was because the notes were in a kind of personal shorthand he had always been able to do. As if to support the possibility, in a different context Strieber said of the duration of the encounter:

I don't think he was there for more than forty-five minutes. Maybe an hour. That's not that long a conversation. [...] I didn't get the impression he was there for hours. I don't think I've ever said that either. I may have. If you read it out, the reading of it takes about forty-five minutes.

This is untrue. The 2011 audiobook version of *The Conversation* alone is three hours long, and reading *The Conversation* aloud at the breakneck rapid pace that Strieber elsewhere described takes at least two hours.^[13]

Asked why it was the Master of the Key appeared to Strieber and not to someone else, Strieber maintained: "I could remember what he said". Strieber also speculated that he was chosen because he was a "sidelined individual whose credibility could be questioned". And he lamented:

In general I'm tuned out. I don't exist. [...] You're not going to hear about Whitley Strieber in the *New York Times* or anywhere like that. [...] The average person no longer knows I exist.

The interviewer brought up a motif in *The Key*, the harvesting of souls, which Knapp claimed to have heard from Area 51 "whistleblower" Bob Lazar who gained notoriety in the 1990s. In fact, the motif appears in at least two places in *The Key* (59, 66). Strieber did not give a firm reply, but elsewhere in the interview gave a potential answer. Speaking of his lifetime of experiences, he said:

It was an incredible education I received. It culminated in *The Key*. It was as if everything that happened to me from 1986 through 1995 or 1996 when it pulled back was preparation for that night in 1998. So that I would be able to understand this man well enough to put down in writing what he said. I think that's what my whole life has been about, frankly. This book: *The Key*.

In the last hour of the interview, Strieber was asked about the censorship of his 2001 book and now had this to say about how it was done.

I do know that it happened in the bluesheets sent to the printer because I've gotten copies of them and the changes are in those sheets. Emendations and crossings out. So it was probably done at my house. But not by me. And certainly not by my wife.

In this fourth description of how and where the censorship was done, Strieber points to the ‘bluesheets’. But it raises enormous questions.

In traditional publishing, bluesheets or ‘blueline proofs’ are proofs that function as photographic negatives of a book’s pages in a book’s final pre-production stage. Bluesheets are different from galleys in that bluesheets are only created after all changes and corrections are presumed made.

Strieber was not using a traditional publishing process since he was self-publishing. But the printing company that seems to have produced *The Key* did use them in certain situations.^[14] Supposing then that Strieber is not simply misspeaking here when he refers to “bluesheets” in a way similar to when he says he “set the type” himself talking about PageMaker:^[15] even if Strieber saw corrections he wanted to make in the bluesheets, and wrote them into the bluesheets, it would make little sense to send these bluesheets to the printer. No commercial printer would agree to implement handwritten changes to a galley or bluesheet, nor would any author or publisher ask since a printer could not be relied upon to do it correctly. Publishing companies have editors for this purpose whereas a commercial printer simply takes a digital file and walks it through physical production. Thus the client of a commercial printer wanting to make changes would have to alter the PageMaker file, send the corrected file to the printer, and get new bluesheets from the printer to inspect.

But all this aside — whether there were actual bluesheets with corrections written into them or regular proof pages — an even more basic and obvious question arises for Strieber’s fourth censorship scenario: if things were crossed out and “emendations” made, *whose handwriting were these emendations in?* The most natural thing in the world would have been for Strieber to say ‘I found emendations and they were in somebody else’s handwriting’. Such an observation would have relied on direct physical proof. Instead Strieber stops short, and so his statement sounds like mere conviction. When Strieber leaves open the obvious matter of the handwriting, one is left to suspect that it is because for some reason he prefers to do so.

In a rather pathetic exchange that took place between Knapp and Strieber while Strieber evidently thought he was off-air, Strieber gave some more insight as to why he thought censorship had been done to *The Key*:

There's people all over me. There have been for a long time. It makes me sick...sick of it...of these stupid people. I'm sick of retired intelligence people who make a habit of jacking people like me around. And who pretend to have some kind of official locomotion when all they have is—they're bored.

CENSORING STRIEBER

WHATEVER Strieber's fears and past persecutions, the fact remained that the censorship scenario did not hold together. Starting with the e-mail exchange in which the differences were brought to Strieber's attention, the censorship claim went through at least four versions:

1. The Microsoft Word file matched the Tarcher, whereas the PageMaker file matched the Walker & Collier.

2. The Microsoft Word file matched the Tarcher, and the original proofs were correct, therefore the PageMaker was 'correct' (and matched the Tarcher); the changes were made after the proof stage, maybe by an e-mail hijack.

3. The changes were visible in the proofs, and while Strieber "did a lot of editing to the proofs", evidently no W&C ΔK were done by him.

4. At least some of the changes were done to the bluesheets, which Strieber says involved "emendations and crossings out" without any mention of whether the handwriting was his or someone else's. Instead of an e-mail hijack, it was done at his house by an unknown party.

Even allowing for changes in Strieber's understanding as to how the censorship might have been done as he was able to examine his digital files, dig out old galleys of the Walker & Collier, *et cetera*, the whole changing edifice of the censorship scenario meant in the end none of Strieber's presentation was convincing except his level of conviction alone. But while he sounded very much in earnest, along with stricken, panicked, confused, and so on, Strieber cannot be said to have been honest. Too many obvious questions were left ignored. For example: given that the Walker & Collier ΔK were now said to be in the galley proofs and/or blueline proofs, were they not also in the PageMaker file? They would have to be unless against all normal practice the commercial printer was the one implementing Strieber's "emendations and crossings-out". What was the last modified date on the PageMaker file? And what about the handwriting of those "emendations and crossings-out"? Why fail to make the obvious clinching point that the

handwriting was not his?

Even more important: given that the Walker & Collier went through galley proofs and/or blueline proofs, why would anyone expect the Microsoft Word file to match the Walker & Collier at all? The text was not only transplanted into PageMaker where Strieber could easily have tinkered with it as it was formatted, but it went through subsequent proof stages in which Strieber made changes.

And what about the proofing process for the Tarcher? Unable to account for the major discontinuity problem with the “monsters in the world of the dead”, Strieber finally conceded it might have been a change he made. Was it not likely that there were other changes made during the Tarcher proofing process that would account for some, if not all of Tarcher ΔK ?

Finally there were the tiny infelicities in Strieber’s presentation. Writing in his first *Journal*, for example, that the Word file had been “converted” to PageMaker when, in fact, using PageMaker involves a complete transformation of content. Saying on Dreamland that he had “missed on the first go-round” the “monsters in the world of the dead” problem when it was at the top of the list he had been sent. Then, of course, there was the misrepresentation of the present author’s views, telling his audience I thought there were changes that “weakened” the Walker & Collier and that I had “glossed over” some of the differences.

Why go so far out of his way to emphasize the November 16, 2000, date for his Microsoft Word file when he knew there was obviously a later PageMaker file and a proofing process? Why be so insistent that he had made no “changes whatsoever of any of the content” only to have to backtrack later? It is possible to see behind the panicked quality of Strieber’s response not simply concern at being harassed by intelligence agencies, but a desire to evade some other truth.

Simple hoaxing does not account for the full picture. Strieber might easily have announced in the lead-up for the Tarcher’s release that the changes came from ten years of thinking long and hard on what the man said, and that the Tarcher was a new and improved, even corrected version of *The Key*. Obedient fans would have happily accepted. For Strieber it seems there were very personal stakes involved, to which the feelings of persecution, standing as proxy, could attest. Perhaps at issue was as much deceiving himself as deceiving the public.

After all, could any of the differences honestly be called censorship? A complete review of the differences is outside of the scope of this paper. But it is useful here to mention some of the more notable differences:

1. Electrical enhancement. In the Tarcher, mind control is said to be used on those in power via ‘electrical enhancement’ in order to control human society, whereas in the Walker & Collier mind control is said to be used very broadly on the entire population by unclear means. The language in the Tarcher has resonances with the *Fragmentary Inclusions* which appeared for the first time in the 2011 Tarcher.

3. A statement to the effect that Strieber’s purported implant makes him free from mind control. This statement is something of a howler and may be unprecedented in the UFO world, i.e. the idea that one’s alien implant could protect one from mind control rather than subject one to it. The claim is even more suspect when viewed alongside other self-oriented elements of Strieber’s narrative.

4. An odd non-sequitur exchange about Osiris and Jesus, mentioned previously. The idea that there was a science of the soul which the appearance of Jesus was intended world-historically to preserve is established in *The Conversation* (25). The exchange about Osiris and Jesus comes off as a repetition of ideas already expressed elsewhere.

Sinister alteration? Or competing versions of Whitley Strieber? Some of the differences will be discussed later in dating the Tarcher.

QUESTIONING THE KEY

THE PROBLEM of the two texts of *The Conversation* and Strieber’s incoherent claims of censorship created a debacle for *The Key*. Even for those willing to believe some sort of ‘true encounter’ had taken place, the fact that no single version of *The Conversation* now existed combined with the fact that the book’s panicked and confused author was making doubtful charges of censorship against his own self-published book meant that it was now possible to view the book in a new way. Greater attention was getting paid to the words of *The Conversation* itself. In the course of this bizarre debacle, I had pointed out instances where statements made by the Master of the Key matched things said by Strieber in very different contexts. Were these isolated instances? Or was there more to be discovered by questioning *The Key*?

With such questions left open, the controversy faded, and mention of “sinister forces” tampering with Strieber’s book stopped as Strieber’s promotional tour on the podcast circuit came to a close.

Less than a year later, the Walker & Collier edition of *The Key* was quietly being offered again at the unknowncountry.com website.^[16]

PART THREE

PROBLEMS WITH THE SCENARIO

IT IS GENERALLY accepted that memories immediately following an event are more accurate than later ones.^[1] As result, one would expect Strieber's earliest descriptions of what happened June 6, 1998, to be more accurate than later ones. According to Strieber, he waited two years to begin transcribing the conversation in earnest, writing *The Key* in late 2000.^[2] As two years is a relatively short interval, one could also expect *The Key* to substantially match any accounts from around the time of the 1998 'true encounter'.

Are there such early descriptions? What light do they shed on the 'true encounter'? And how well do they correspond to *The Key*?

In fact, five descriptions of the 'true encounter' can be found in interviews and in Strieber's *Journal* following the June 6, 1998 event:

- ✶ *Journal* – July 19, 1998, *Encounter of June 6, 1998*
- ✶ **Coast to Coast AM with Art Bell** interview, July 27, 1998
- ✶ **Interview with Michael Lindemann**, August 5, 1998, *Whitley Strieber: Toronto Encounter Alters His Perspective On 'Visitors' and Coming Catastrophe*
- ✶ *Journal* – November 1, 1998, *The June 6, 1998 Experience: Update*
- ✶ **Interview with Sean Casteel**, November 1998, *Whitley Strieber And The Toronto Experience*



WHITLEY'S JOURNAL

ENCOUNTER OF JUNE 6, 1998 - JULY 19, 1998

Strieber's *Journal* with its July 19, 1998, date is the first account of his experience in the hotel room in Toronto.^[3] In this *Journal* entry, Strieber begins his description of the scenario more or less as he would in *The Key* two years later:

When I threw the door open, a man in a dark colored suit came hurrying in. He was short-- maybe four and a half feet tall-- and had a rather pointed face. But he was a man, a human being, by anything that I could see. I rushed along behind him, totally astonished. I was completely normal. No altered state.

We talked for about half an hour. When I asked him where he was from, he said, “Toronto.” I asked him if he was a human being. He said that he was, but that he did not pay taxes. I asked him if he had ever lived off planet. He said that there is a higher world, and we can sometimes gain the right to enter it in life. [...]

The above is substantially the same as the scenario presented in *The Key*. But there is one important difference: the appearance of the visitor. In the above account, he is only four and a half feet tall and with a “rather pointed face”. He is described as wearing a “dark colored suit”, a far less refined description than the charcoal turtleneck sweater and jacket given later (4). Strieber’s description here is evocative of his visitor accounts with the “pointed” face and the one-piece jumpsuits, and leads to the obvious question how under normal circumstances “a man, a human being” could be four and a half feet tall.

The *Journal* then begins to differ more and more from his later account:

Gently, he told me that our world is “irretrievably lost.” He said, “the ones to whom you pay your taxes will be dragged in the streets before this suffering is ended.” What suffering? “You will see the signs in fire. Your planet’s life has turned a turning in its path. There will be a great extinction here.”

Every word he uttered contained whole vast oceans of other words and meanings that came flying into my mind as he spoke. I grabbed a yellow pad and took notes.

I asked if the visitors would intervene. No. If they would take anybody off the planet. He only stared silently at me. His face seemed-- hungry? Sad? I really do not know how to interpret it.

One detail here tallies with Strieber’s later description: the issue of how the visitor’s words affected him. The “vast oceans of other words and meanings” opened up is a detail to which Strieber would refer as late as 2011^[4] though one might easily ask: how well can a later book claim to be a transcription if so much of what is being communicated is not ‘said’ exactly?

But most of the material quoted in this excerpt does not appear in *The Conversation*. The phrase “irretrievably lost” (13) appears at the start of the conversation but as “You may be irretrievably lost”. In the *Journal* entry, it is more final. None of the rest—“those to whom you pay your

taxes”, “dragged in the streets”, the world’s “turning”, asking if the visitors would “take anybody off the planet” — appears in *The Conversation*, even as paraphrase.

It is worth noting, however, that again there is a descriptor evocative of Strieber’s visitors: the “hungry” look, hard to reconcile with the picture of an ordinary person under normal circumstances. By contrast it matches Strieber’s feral ‘visitors’ quite well.

Strieber’s description of the encounter continues and suggests that the main purpose of the visit was a new “path” Strieber would teach:

There emerged an incredible promise: that an ancient path would again emerge. And suddenly I knew who this man was. Since I met one of them in 1971, I have known that there was an incredible secret group in this world, who knew the true path of the human soul. He told me then I would one day play a part in inducing this hidden path to resurface. He taught it to me, and I committed it to memory. I asked what I should do with it? He only shook his head.

In fact, the “path” here almost certainly refers to a certain way of working with Tarot cards that Strieber would present in a 2002 self-published book called *The Path*.

Strieber continues:

Just before he left, the man in Toronto had me drink a fluid. He reminded me that I had taken this same drink as a child. He said that it contained the structures of my life, up until that night. He was here to give me the second cup, which would contain everything from June 6 until my death. He told me when and how I am to die, but he also said, “if you value your sanity, you will never utter this.” I can certainly see that. But I sense the truth of what he said, and I think that I have gained the peace of a dying man.

I have also gained a mission: our world is going to go through a time of great agony. I can tell you this: many of the people who now hold sway over us are going to end up despised by a thousand future generations. Their names will echo in the ages as the names of the blackest demons of hell.

No discussion surrounding the drinking of a white liquid appears in *The Conversation*, though the occurrence is mentioned in both *The*

Master of the Key and *Who Was He?* sections from 2001 with no mention of “structures” of life being in the liquid or what it might have been. Likewise there is no mention of Strieber hearing the time and manner of his death nor the “if you value your sanity” line anywhere in *The Key*.

He told me what would happen, and told me each sign to watch for. Horrifically and incredibly, two of the signs occurred within a month of the meeting: “great fires” and a “plague of cold water in the western sea.”

I came home from my author tour to a city blanketed in smoke from the huge fires that swept southern Mexico and Central America. Then I discovered that the strongest La Nina on record was literally killing sea life in the Pacific with cold water.

Neither of these two “signs” appear anywhere in *The Key*. By 2000–2001, the environmental catastrophe that Strieber would say was discussed will have morphed into a superstorm starting in the Atlantic that ends in a new ice age. It is worth mentioning in passing that two of Strieber’s tendencies are visible here which will be important later in the current article: Strieber reading recent events backwards into past prophecies; and Strieber’s preoccupation with his own “mission” and the “part” he must play.

The difference between this *Journal* entry and what is presented in *The Key* is quite remarkable. The *Journal* account contains vivid, even poignant details that if real, one would expect to appear in the 2001 book. For example, “I asked what I should do with it? He only shook his head”. The question and its specific visual image are nowhere in *The Key*.

While there is overlap between this early account and the 2001 book, one cannot help but get the sense that the *Journal* account contains the most important features of the encounter as Strieber saw them at the time. Strieber is giving a description in this *Journal* of an event that happened just two months earlier, and according to Strieber the main focus of the meeting was the “ancient path” and Strieber’s role “in inducing this hidden path to resurface”. But this is nowhere in the 2001 *The Conversation*. Also specific signs of environmental collapse were given in this account and rather unmistakable statements made by the “man in Toronto” which Strieber presented as direct quotes. By the time of the publication of *The Key*, the signs and the quotes will have fallen away or morphed into something else.



COAST TO COAST AM WITH ART BELL

INTERVIEW, JULY 27, 1998

Strieber's next account of the Toronto encounter begins around forty minutes into his Coast to Coast AM interview. Strieber as he does elsewhere asserts the fact that he was "totally, completely conscious", that the Master of the Key looked like an "ordinary person", and that the true encounter was like a "straightforward meeting".

At the same time, even within the same breath, Strieber also associates the Master of the Key with an otherworldly being spotted in the woods near his cabin:

The reason he looked familiar to me is because the children back in the days when we had our cabin in upstate New York used to see this man in the woods a lot, running through the woods. And so, the workmen who worked who worked in the [...] once I had some workmen take down some poison ivy. They'd gotten into some trees and they saw them. And they came up to the house and they said 'We're finished. We're not going to work here anymore because of that man that's running around out in the woods is weird and looks like someone out of one of your books.'

What is striking here is that the reason the man "looked familiar" according to Strieber was that some children and some workmen saw him. Not Strieber himself. Indeed, in the Walker & Collier this is made clear:

His presence made me and my wife extremely nervous, and I used to try to see him myself, but I never did. [...] As I have never laid eyes on him at all, I cannot be certain that he was the same person whom I met in Toronto.

It is certainly odd to say a man looks "familiar" when you have never seen him before. It is an instance of Strieber remembering-by-imagining to which we will return later.

Telepathic? ... Not to my knowledge, but there was ... [41:50] There was something about the way it worked that... everything that was said, every word that was said had kind of freight with it. It had, it seems to me, almost an infinity of meaning. And there

were also some words used that I cannot remember.

[42:20] They were sort of like hyperdimensional words. [...] What people used to call words of power. And they affected me when he uttered them. [...] [42:45] At the time I even noticed that some of them weren't in English, at least not English as I understand it. But later I realized that there were some words that had contained whole vast complicated ideas.

Thus while Strieber insists he had a straightforward encounter with an ordinary person, he simultaneously associates the Master of the Key with a short otherworldly being and says it spoke to him using words that were not in ordinary English.

Strieber then goes on to discuss what the Master of the Key said:

He said and it was so plain, he said: 'Your world as you understand it is breaking up.' [Bell: Breaking up?] 'Breaking up' was the phrase. 'And this cannot continue as it is. The die has already been cast. This is finished.' And when he said 'this is finished', it was one of the moments when it seemed to be so much connected with — it was as if the whole of history had flashed through my mind carried on the tone of voice that he used saying, uttering the words. And it was just amazing. I've never had an experience like that in my life, hearing somebody speak in such a way that their tone of voice carried a whole world with them. It was awesome.

Note here Strieber underlines that “[b]reaking up was the phrase”. This phrase appears nowhere in *The Conversation*. Likewise, “the die has already been cast” is not in *The Conversation*, and the poignant moment Strieber describes in which the “whole of history” flashed through his mind — is nowhere in *The Conversation*. Strieber says above that he’d “never had an experience like that” in his life, referring to hearing the Master of the Key speak. But what was said will change greatly by 2001.

Like his earlier *Journal* account, Strieber in this interview also is keyed into his role in the catastrophic changes to come:

My whole experience was about the process of that transition [...] and the role I would play in it.

This self-oriented dimension to Strieber’s accounts is further visible in what he describes next:

[57:40] Let me tell you the next thing the man said. [...] The next thing he said was that we are about to leave this consciousness. That we are about to extend human consciousness outside space and time altogether. And he said ‘you will leave the footprints you now see in the past’. That it would be not just a spiritual thing, but a physical thing. And I said ‘what footprints?’ And he referred me to a book called *Forbidden Archaeology* with which I am quite familiar.

[Bell: Oh, my God. Do you swear to me on a stack of Communion books that you didn’t hear Sunday’s show?] You know, I’m a very faithful person and I swear to you by the religion in which I believe that I did not.

[59:40] On page 811 of *Forbidden Archaeology*, which by the way I have here, it is by Michael Cremona and Richard Thompson. As I say, I’m familiar with it. They wrote a shortened version of this book that I believe I may have written a foreword to. Oh, no, another book of theirs called *Alien Agenda* I wrote a foreword to. [[note: S is referring to *Alien Identities* by Richard L. Thompson alone]] In any case, there on this page is a story of a print of a shoe that was found in Cambrian shale. You know how old that is? That’s 500 million years old. There was even a hole in the shoe. The stitching around the edges of the shoe is visible in the fossil print.

In what will become a clear pattern in Strieber’s accounts, the Master of the Key is very interested in what Strieber is reading at a given moment, often referencing it directly as above. But in *The Conversation* there is no mention at all of “footprints you now see in the past”, nor Strieber reading *Forbidden Archaeology*.

Finishing the discussion of the Toronto encounter, Strieber said:

[1:37:35] I talked to him — I think it was ... it may have been as much as a half an hour, but it was certainly no less than fifteen minutes. I wasn’t keeping track of time. [Bell: Could it have been a lot longer? Did you have any reference at all for time?] No, but I didn’t feel like there was a lot of missing time or anything. And when he left, it was so abrupt it was almost funny. [Bell: In what manner?] Well, he just stood up. He’d been sitting on the...sort of...I guess...I guess he was sitting on a chair...beside the bed. And right in what felt like the whole middle of the thing, he just

stood up and walked out. Closed the door behind him. Just like that. And was gone. [...] And I went to the door. And by the time I was standing at the door, I was so tired, I felt like I weighed five hundred pounds. I had no way to follow him. I could not do it. I went and I laid back down on the bed. When I woke up in the morning, my feet were still off the foot of the bed. I hadn't even gotten all the way into the bed. But I felt very good. I felt — fine when I woke up. I didn't feel exhausted as I sometimes used to after these things.

In this account then the 'true encounter' lasted for as little as fifteen minutes. What's more, it ended by the Master of the Key abruptly standing up in the middle of the conversation and walking out.



INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL LINDEMANN

AUGUST 5, 1998

He seemed short and slight to me. He was not a stocky man... He wore black clothing. I thought it was a military type outfit. It was unusual clothing, more like a leisure suit but not military enough to say this was a uniform. He had rather sparse gray hair and an elongated face, a sharp nose and chin. His eyelashes were very white.^[5]

Strieber's description of the Master of the Key's clothing as a "military type outfit", of course, differs somewhat from the more conventional description he would give later in *The Key*. But perhaps more significant is that in this interview, Strieber continues to associate the Master of the Key with a creature described as alien:

The children used to see him around the cabin back in the old days. All the kids did. I think the same man. That was what next crossed my mind. As soon as he started talking, I thought, "Oh my god, it's the little man who used to be at the cabin." I never saw him, but some workmen who were there quit because he walked across the road in front of them, and they came up to the house and said, "There's an alien out in the woods, and we're not going to be pulling those vines down." I was having them pull some poison ivy out of a tree. And they left.

The problem here is two-fold: on the one hand, maintaining that the so-called Master of the Key is one and the same with a small creature described as “alien” in appearance rather raises the question as to how Strieber can also maintain that the Master of the Key looked completely human. On the other hand, the question therefore must arise as to whether it was the “straightforward meeting” Strieber said it was on Coast to Coast AM.

ML: You mentioned that he communicated in a very strange and powerful way. Can you elaborate? Was it telepathic?

WS: He had access to my mind in ways that were really unusual. It wasn't exactly like telepathy, but some of the words he said, I can't repeat. I don't know how. He would say a sentence like, “There is going to be a series of events that take place,” and then this other word would come out. And this word seemed to contain enormous amounts of information. It was not like an ordinary word. It had a rough kind of garbled sound to it, like he was choking. Fantastic words. They gave meaning, to me, to the phrase “words of power,” because I'm telling you, I've never heard the like, and I could never make sounds like that. If that involved telepathy, then he was telepathic as well.

Garbled sounds and choking noises would certainly pose a problem for later transcription. But at no point in *The Conversation* does Strieber note the Master of the Key making garbled sounds or choking. Moreover, the fact that Strieber twice within months of the Toronto event described telepathic or semi-telepathic communication involving “words of power” that were not normal English, and perhaps not even words, further suggests that it was not a “straightforward meeting”. Rather, as Strieber simultaneously suggests but also denies with a kind of eerie cognitive dissonance, it was a “hyperdimensional” encounter.

As to how the encounter ended, Strieber told Lindemann this:

ML: How did the meeting end?

WS: There was something I had to drink. He had this drink. It was very, very unpleasant, not at all like something that anyone in their right mind would drink. I argued about it a lot. That's when I suddenly became a nine-year-old again, having the same argument -- although I must admit that, as an adult, I was rather interested at what might happen. The whole thing was fascinat-

ing. I was wide awake -- there was no question in my mind. So I did drink it, and it tasted like citrate of magnesia. It was thick and pale -- it really looked horrible. There was not much of it, just the bottom of the glass. It wasn't liquid. It had a shape, like jello. It was so horrible it seemed utterly ridiculous. But I did eventually drink it, because he said if I did, a lot of memory would return. He tempted me with that, so I drank it. I have a feeling that I drank the book. That's what it seems like, anyway. Strangely, the next morning, the glass was gone. I definitely would have taken it back to Texas for testing, but it was nowhere to be found.

Of course, this differs from the description of the visitor's abrupt departure given to Art Bell a week or so earlier. And while we might entertain the idea that an unknown substance is what allowed Strieber to transcribe a book with such clarity of recall two years later, it is worth pointing out that in 2001 he had this to say about the glass:

After I drank this substance, I remember nothing until the next morning. When I woke up, I immediately did three things. First, I looked for my notes. They were there, lying on the table beside the bed where I had put them. Then I went into the bathroom, thinking that maybe some of the white liquid would be left in the bottom of one of the glasses. But they were clean. I then telephoned my wife. (6)

In August 1998, "[s]trangely, the next morning, the glass was gone". In 2001, it was there and it was clean. So much for Strieber's memory being enhanced.

Also worth noting is the curious incident of the notes in the nighttime. In the Walker & Collier version of *The Key*, Strieber says (above) the notes were "lying on the table beside the bed". By 2011's Tarcher, they were "lying on the floor".^[6]



WHITLEY'S JOURNAL

THE JUNE 6, 1998 EXPERIENCE: UPDATE - NOVEMBER 1, 1998

In his *Journal* dated November 1, 1998,^[7] Strieber wrote that the Toronto encounter had moved to the "center of [his] inner life" and that the Master of the Key was for him now a sort of "male muse". In a brief discussion of what was said, Strieber wrote:

I remember thinking, “is this really somebody from another world, somebody who has traveled through space?” But when I asked him, he said, “I’m your cousin.” Whoops, what did that mean. Also, when I asked if machines could have intelligence, he said, “we do.” But when I asked him if he was a machine, he replied, “If I was, I would deceive you.” Another question: do human beings have souls? Answer: “not all, but all may.”

The line “I’m your cousin” appears nowhere in *The Key*. Machine intelligence is discussed in *The Key* and the statement “If I was, I would deceive you” appears as “If I were an intelligent machine, I would deceive you”. But the “we do” line which the Master of the Key uses to flatly declare himself an intelligent machine is nowhere in *The Key*. And the answer to the question whether human beings have souls, “not all, but all may”, appears in *The Conversation* as “Not all human beings are radiant bodies. But all may become such.”



INTERVIEW WITH SEAN CASTEEL

NOVEMBER 1998

Strieber described the Master of the Key in an interview with Sean Casteel as follows:

I threw the door open and this man walked into the room. He was smaller than I was by a significant amount, to where the first thought that might have even crossed my mind was that he was a child. He looked old. He was maybe four foot eight to five feet tall at most.^[8]

In this account, the height of the Master of the Key is beginning to increase compared to the first *Journal*. And though still abnormally short at just under five feet tall, somehow Strieber is also able to say without feeling the need to clarify: “He certainly didn’t look like anything except a human being”.

Regarding his manner of communication, Strieber told Casteel:

There were also words that he would use that now, looking back, I don’t know those words. I just remember them as kind of gravely sounds. I don’t know what they were. But these words contained huge amounts of information.

Again, calling a dialogue a transcription when the communication consisted of “gravely” sounds and words that were not familiar English should be problematic — still less maintaining later that the transcription is “80% to 90% accurate”. According to Strieber, though, the communication involved an almost telepathic sharing of mental content:

The thing is that every word he said seemed to have attached to it thousands of ideas. And I have in my head now the contents. I mean, it's like having the contents of somebody else's mind in your own mind. Or at least part of it.

But the question as to just whose mind was being accessed is perhaps inadvertently answered in the interview shortly thereafter:

S. In the end of this, the body of man is going to be transformed. Not just the mind of man or the spirit of man. It's not a mind/body or spirit/body—there's no spirit/body bifurcation. This looks upon the body and mind and spirit as all one thing. So that instead of an out-of-body experience, you might be able to just plain fly, as far as I can tell.

Q. Well, you also talk about that concept in “The Wolfen,” the idea that the mind changes the body. The force of the soul acting on the body allows you to—

S. Yes, well it's something similar to that. I didn't realize that I'd talked about that in “The Wolfen,” but now that you mention it, I guess I must have.

Finally, Strieber gives a description of the Master of the Key's appearance and something important Strieber was told:

Yeah. It was black, dark clothing. A suit with a jacket that was buttoned up to the collar and a pair of dark pants. He was sort of normal. I can't remember too much detail about the style of his clothing because I was really riveted to what he was saying and by interacting with him. And the fun of it. It was terribly fun. It wasn't a pleasant conversation, but it was exhilarating to have this happening. I was very well aware at the time of how extremely unusual the whole experience was. And he kept sort of giggling almost because he was, too. He was almost laughing at the idea that I was obviously so excited. And yet at the same time,

the things he was talking about were really intense.

There was one thing that was fairly extraordinary. He told me the date of my death. And he said, “But you must keep this a secret, because if you tell anyone, then it is possible that it will change.” And that is very true. Because if I told that and it became public knowledge, maybe someone would decide to change it just to prove me wrong. You know, and blow my brains out. So it was a very interesting thing. But I’ve had that happen before. I was told the day of my death by the Visitors sometime ago and the day came and passed and I didn’t die. So whether that is something to be believed or not, I don’t know.

The description of the Master of the Key wearing a “suit” that was “buttoned up to the collar” doesn’t quite tally with the appearance given in the published version of *The Key* of a “charcoal turtleneck under a black jacket” (4). The “giggling” does not really come across in *The Conversation*, though Strieber does speak elsewhere of the Master of the Key’s joyousness.^[9] And again, the disclosure of the date of Strieber’s death appears nowhere in *The Conversation* at all. Nor does this:

Q. But it’s all coming out eventually in a new book?

S. Yes. It was very specific. He even gave me the title. I can’t give it to you, but he gave me the title and he made me write it down.

Thus it appears that the Master of the Key gave Strieber the ultimate title for his book. This appears nowhere in *The Conversation* or *The Key*, nor apparently anywhere else.

At the end of the interview Strieber expresses some doubts:

And there’s always, always, in the back of my mind, now that it’s a memory, and it’s not really happening at this moment, did it happen at all? That is something that never, ever leaves me. Because when you’re dealing with something this strange, and this intense, could it be that I had an extremely intense dream? But if I did, then the material imparted to me seems to have still come from a really sterling source. Because of its vitality and its excellence and its newness.

So even if that’s the case, I think it’s still valid. That’s why I felt I would begin to talk about it. Because whether the guy was really

there or not – I mean, it’s a memory right now, just like my last memory of being in my apartment in Texas. It seems no more or less valid than any ordinary memory. But the strangeness of what happened makes me keep it in question anyway. Do you see what I mean?

There is a frustrating double conceit here. For one, the basic “newness” of the ideas to which Strieber was exposed during his ‘true encounter’ can be strongly doubted as later sections will show. But second, however much Strieber might keep his experience(s) “in question” in the privacy of his own thoughts, he would nonetheless spend years advocating publicly for the basic reality of his ‘true encounter’ along with the importance of the messages he was given. Indeed, the response is an example of a recurring rhetorical strategy in Strieber: paint as vivid a picture as possible in order to convince as to the reality of this or that alleged experience; then hedge his bets by saying the experience should be kept “in question”.

After all, given the number of wildly differing elements in the accounts presented here, one could ask whether for Strieber there was anything “in question” at all. Indeed, so little effort seems to have been taken to arrive at a single consistent description of events in the months after the ‘true encounter’, that it seems that its basic reality was radically closed to question with the details of the encounter unusually open to constant reworkings and reimaginings. The physical appearance of the Master of the Key is one example. In the earliest description, he was four-and-a-half feet tall. His height then began to increase, and would not stop increasing. In a 2003 audio commentary, Strieber described the Master of the Key as “five-foot-six or five-foot-seven” and in another commentary “five-foot seven, five-foot-eight maybe”.^[10] By the 2011 Tarcher, he had grown still more: “He seemed rather slight to me, perhaps five-foot-eleven, weighing maybe a hundred and seventy to a hundred and eighty pounds”.^[11] Looking at the descriptions of the Master of the Key and of the ‘true encounter’ over time, it is difficult not to detect a tendency on Strieber’s part to make the Master of the Key more and more conventionally human and the ‘true encounter’ into a more and more conventional conversation.

CONCLUSION

AS WE HAVE SEEN there are major problems with the basic scenario of the ‘true encounter’. While Strieber’s early descriptions of the encounter have points of overlap, they are also inconsistent enough that they can be seen as accounts of different events. Basic details like the Master of the Key’s manner of departure differ entirely from one account to the next.

Comparing his early accounts of the scenario with that of the 2001 book, it can be said that these differ so completely that in November 1998 — just five months after the ‘true encounter’ — Strieber said of the Master of the Key’s physical appearance that he resembled a child.

Worse, both specific statements made and vivid moments of recollection seem to vary depending on the account. Strieber will draw special attention to a particular utterance in one account only for the utterance to go missing in other accounts and disappear from the conversation altogether by 2001. Strieber will talk of being profoundly moved at a particular moment and describe it visually (for example, saying of the Master of the Key: “He only shook his head”) and neither the moment nor anything like it will appear in 2001. At issue here are not trivial or arbitrary details, but details that Strieber’s storyteller’s art goes out of its way to convince you are true, details which then contradict or vanish altogether.

At this stage, given the problems reconciling all of Strieber’s accounts of the scenario, the most charitable reading that can be given is that Strieber had a true encounter that was “hyperdimensional”, and that Strieber seems to be in a curious sort of denial about the fact. In his accounts, he ascribes what can only be called otherworldly qualities to the encounter while at the same time maintaining the opposite, as if by insisting on its absolute, conventional reality he is better able to form descriptions of the encounter and to generally insist upon the truth of what was ‘said’.

Unfortunately, this charitable reading of the basic scenario of the ‘true encounter’ does not overcome a separate set of problems with *The Conversation*. A close scrutiny of *The Conversation* yields ample evidence — an embarrassment of riches, in fact — that the content of *The Conversation* did not originate with the Master of the Key.

PART FOUR

PROBLEMS WITH *THE CONVERSATION*

IF STRIEBER'S early recollections of the 'true encounter' are more reliable than his later ones, then the encounter of June 6, 1998, was a "hyperdimensional" one with enough strangeness that his mind was closing the door to the experience the very next morning. "There will come a day when I'll tell you that I don't think he was real. Never let me forget that he was" (6-7). One might say for good reason: a man enters the room with an elongated face and sharp features (much like one of Strieber's 'visitors') and stays for something that seemed subjectively like fifteen to forty-five minutes, during which time he speaks by growling and either gets up and abruptly leaves or forces Strieber to drink a glass of white liquid (the glass either disappearing or remaining to be found the next day, though squeaky clean). By morning, in the same way a dream fades from waking consciousness, the 'true encounter' was becoming a closed book.

Of course, there might have been no true encounter in the first place. It might have been a fragmentary half-dream, half-desperate vision made 'real' later through an arduous composition process. But whether a dream or 'true encounter' consisting of growls and single words representing ideas that can only be pictured what must be said given the early accounts is that *what took place was not a conversation in any normal sense*.

That alone means *The Conversation* cannot be a transcription: no conversation, no transcription.

But there are other problems. In the *Afterword* to the Tarcher, Strieber describes his notes this way:

I saw my yellow notepad on the floor, covered with scrawls. It had been in my briefcase when I went to bed, so I must have pulled it out and taken notes. I grabbed it and looked at them.

They were pretty much just squiggles. They didn't seem to relate to any sort of a conversation.

and then:

Had he been real, or a dream? If you took notes in your sleep, they might look like this.

Here Strieber might be taking a devil's advocate view for the benefit of his audience, but if the notes exist at all (they have never been produced) the above is perhaps not wholly inaccurate. In one description given by Strieber's wife, the notes are said to have amounted to a single page.^[1] If this is not inaccurate, it is simply contrary to all normal expectation that two hours worth of conversation could be reconstructed from "squiggles" that do not "seem to relate to any sort of a conversation". And Strieber's own account of just how this was possible also evolved over time. In the Walker & Collier, he suggested that it was something intrinsic to the notes themselves, some near-magical quality of the lines on paper that we are left to suppose was related to the true encounter itself:

I lay back looking over the notes. There wasn't much there — less, in fact, than I'd hoped there would be. And yet, they had a strange quality to them, as if each word was capable of causing a whole spring to flow in my mind. (7)

In 2011, he would take a different tack, claiming that a personalized shorthand system was something he had always used:

I have a pretty good memory and I took — I take mnemonic notes. In other words, I'll take a note that just says, you know, a couple of words maybe. Here and there. And I can always pretty well put together — I've always been able to do this since I was in school. I would put together, sometimes the note just a little symbol, or it'll be two words, and I could really put it together pretty well from that. [Knapp: Yeah, your own shorthand.] Yeah. I'm comfortable with that, and that's how I did it.^[2]

But then why call this personal shorthand system "pretty much just squiggles" that "didn't seem to relate to any sort of a conversation" and elsewhere "indecipherable"?

The Conversation itself also bears certain signs of being a construct. For instance, one finds this question:

What is real religion?

From outside of time, man's effort to know God appears as a single form, a work of art that has evolved across history. You have created it in three phases. The first is negative, the age of

sacrifice. This is why the Old Testament God is so terrible. [...] (41)

then asked a second time:

What is real religion?

A means of transforming accident into fate. It is a science. Real religion and real science are the same. (45)

It is unlikely that this very particular sort of question would appear twice in a naturally unfolding conversation. It is more likely a by-product of the composition process that took place later.

Lastly, there is one excellent reason why *The Conversation* is a construct: despite seeming to have a literary unity and a smooth flow throughout, there are things that according to Strieber were said which do not appear in it. Included in the Tarcher is a section called *Fragmentary Inclusions* introduced by Strieber thus:

I am including a number of conversational fragments here that I was unable to place in context. If they are parts of more complex exchanges, I have, unfortunately, failed to remember them in their entirety.

The fact that there are fragments left over from a conversation that otherwise seems organically integrated from beginning to end alone means *The Conversation* is not a faithful transcription. Things are evidently missing, and the existence of a *Fragmentary Inclusions* section leads one to wonder just how much *The Conversation* was shaped, its rough edges sanded down and gaps closed to create the appearance of unity. Either *The Conversation* is incomplete, in which case it is not a true and accurate chronicle of an event (a conversation) with the *Fragmentary Inclusions* meant to fill in the gaps, or the very similar-sounding *Fragmentary Inclusions* are an invention, raising the question of just how much of *The Conversation* might also be a creation of Strieber's own.

THE MISSING GURDJIEFF

“Is not this the same thing which is described in the Acts as the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, when they began to understand divers languages?” asked someone.

I noticed that such questions always irritated G.

“I don’t know, I wasn’t there,” he said.

—*In Search of the Miraculous*, P. D. Ouspensky

What did the word sound like?

I don’t know, I wasn’t there.

— *The Conversation* (Tarcher ΔK)

LIKE THE CURIOUS INCIDENT of the dog in the nighttime, certain things are notable for their absence. In *The Conversation* the most conspicuous absence is mention of G. I. Gurdjieff.

Gurdjieff was a Greek-Armenian guru who was the main figure in a spiritual movement that came to be called by its practitioners ‘the work’. His teaching was introduced to the world by P. D. Ouspensky, a Russian intellectual and pupil of Gurdjieff’s, through his famous book *In Search of the Miraculous*.^[3]

Whitley Strieber spent around thirteen years actively participating in a New York City Gurdjieff group.^[4] There he practiced meditation and rose to the level of group leader. Strieber mentions Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Maurice Nicoll (another Gurdjieffian) in his works, dedicates his book *The Path* to Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, and prominent Gurdjieffians, and it is clear to anyone familiar with Strieber’s biography that ‘the work’ was a major influence on his spiritual and intellectual trajectory.

Despite the suggestion in *The Key* that the Master of the Key has been present throughout Strieber’s life — thus all the notes and flourishes of personal interest to Strieber, for example, Meister Eckhart — mention of Gurdjieff is conspicuously absent. This is all the more remarkable when it is considered just how much of *The Conversation* appears to come from Gurdjieff-Ouspensky. Indeed, so much of the “new vision” of the Master of the Key seems to be taken from Gurdjieff-Ouspensky that one wonders whether the reason why Gurdjieff is not mentioned is because of what some have called the anxiety of influence.^[5]

One gets a possible whiff of the anxiety of influence in the following:

What's it like, going to another planet?

The details from world to world can be very different. But the basic laws of reality remain the same.

Which is why the visitors communicate with me in Masonic terms?

Precisely. Three is three and seven is seven. The craft is God's plan for freedom.

You are endorsing Masonry?

I am endorsing the craft in its most impeccable form. Where the craft is secret, there is danger of corruption. (34-35)

Masonry is said to have a variety of 'sacred' numbers, among them three and seven. But it is notable in the context of a discussion of "laws of reality" and the numbers three and seven that Strieber did not think to connect what was being said to Gurdjieff. After all, in the Gurdjieff work the Law of Three and the Law of Seven are central:

This is the 'Law of Three' or the law of the three principles or the three forces. It consists of the fact that every phenomenon, on whatever scale and in whatever world it may take place, from molecular to cosmic phenomena, is the result of the combination or the meeting of three different and opposing forces. [...]

[...] In order to understand the difference between the influences of various worlds we must better understand the law of three and then, further, still another fundamental law—the Law of Seven, or the law of octaves. (ISOM, ch 4)

A stronger possible sign of the anxiety of influence surrounds the assertion that three major religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam) form a triad, being "one system in three" (27) created by "three masters" — a fact "hidden" from mankind until the Master of the Key revealed it to Strieber in 1998.

You find your own, in life, in love, in religion. But understand this: the teachings of Buddha, Christ and Mohammed are inter-linked. They are one system in three, not three separate religions. This has been hidden from you for a long time.

Three in one? A triad?

A triad. Christianity is the active side of the triad, Islam the passive, Buddhism the reconciling. Christianity seeks God, Islam

surrenders to God, Buddhism finds God. When you see these as three separate systems, you miss the great teaching of which each contains but a part. Seek the kingdom as a Christian, give yourself to God as a Moslem, find your new companion in the dynamic silence of Buddhist meditation.

Then a true seeker seeks in all faiths?

These three masters created one system. But there are many systems that have evolved in other ways, that have grown rather than been created. (27)

Strieber refers to the “triad” and the three forces (positive, negative, reconciling) throughout his body of work. But he seems to always ascribe the notion to Buckminster Fuller,^[6] for example in the Walker & Collier section called *The Prophecy of the Key*:

More plainly spoken, the idea of the triad as expressed in modern esoteric philosophy is this: that positive and negative forces, pressing against each other, come into balance. Buckminster Fuller called this the fundamental principle of the universe. (89)

Strieber does it again in the *Afterword* to the Tarcher:

If one understands the ancient law of triads clearly, his explanation of the way the three approaches work in concert makes a great deal of sense. Basically the Law of Three, which Buckminster Fuller called “the building block of the universe,” conceives that everything is divided into interlocking triads. A triad has an active side, a passive side and a third side that keeps the other two in balance.

Unfortunately, Fuller never called the triad the “fundamental building block of the universe”, and according to Fuller himself as well as his foremost interpreter, there is no fundamental building block.^[7] However much Strieber might want to credit Fuller with the notion of a triad composed of three forces, Strieber cannot help but be aware that it is in Gurdjieff where he finds the notion. Indeed, it is one of the better known motifs of ‘the work’. Here in *Miraculous*, Gurdjieff refers to the three forces, calling the “reconciling” force “neutralizing”:^[8]

“The first fundamental law of the universe is the law of three forces, or three principles, or, as it is often called, the law of three. According to this law every action, every phenomenon in all worlds without exception, is the result of a simultaneous action of three forces—the positive, the negative, and the neutralizing. [...]” (ch 7)

The Gurdjieffian triad appears again in *The Conversation*. In another exchange, the age of the Old Testament is said to be “negative”, the New Testament “positive”, and the new age reconciling inasmuch as “man and God become one” (42–43). In neither the case of the one system in three nor the positive, negative, and reconciling ages is Gurdjieff mentioned by name. It is as if the basic applicability of the Gurdjieffian triad is simply taken for granted.

When one looks closely at *The Key* Gurdjieff’s influence seems to be pervasive. For instance: the assertion in *The Conversation* about the “one system in three” is curious, not simply because it attempts to conceive of three sprawling religions spanning millennia, whole continents, and countless mutations as “one system in three”. It is curious because of the missing criteria used in ascertaining the three religions of significance. After all: why these three religions? While the Master of the Key makes deferential comments about Hinduism and “the Egyptian religion” (27), clearly for him Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam are the three pre-eminent religions of our time. The reason why according to the Master of the Key is that they were created by three “masters”:

These three masters created one system. But there are many systems that have evolved in other ways, that have grown rather than been created. (27)

It is a questionable basis given that history increasingly suggests that none of these three “masters” ever existed as actual people, though despite this, the Master of the Key says:

Who were Mohammed and Buddha?

Exactly who history portrays them to have been. [...] (27)

However, as with so many things in *The Conversation*, this strange criterion that a religion be created by a “master” can be explained if ones looks at Gurdjieff–Ouspensky:

“You must understand,” he said, “that every real religion, that is, one that has been created by learned people for a definite aim [...] (ch 4)

In *Miraculous*, Gurdjieff defines “real religion” as one that is “created by learned people for a definite aim”, and thus not emerging thoughtlessly out of the chaos of life. A “real religion” is devised by “learned people”. It appears that Gurdjieff-Ouspensky provides the missing context for the opaque assertion in *The Conversation* that it was important for three “masters” to have “created” the three systems: Gurdjieff’s preoccupation with real religion.

And “real religion” is a preoccupation of *The Conversation*’s:

What is real religion?

From outside of time, man’s effort to know God appears as a single form, a work of art that has evolved across history. You have created it in three phases. The first is negative, the age of sacrifice. This is why the Old Testament God is so terrible. [...] (41)

The question as to “real religion” is even asked a second time:

What is real religion?

A means of transforming accident into fate. It is a science. Real religion and real science are the same. (45)

The Master of the Key’s deferential comment about the “Egyptian religion” mentioned above also has a parallel in Gurdjieff-Ouspensky. In *The Conversation*, Strieber connects Christianity with ancient Egypt as on page 25 (Walker & Collier):

Ancient knowledge was being murdered by Roman ignorance and Roman power. This knowledge consisted of how to consciously form a radiant body so that you would not recur into the physical, so that you would be free. Christ was here to preserve this knowledge and pass it down. But even his deposit was corrupted by Roman politicians, who transformed his practice into a religion after he died.

And in a Tarcher ΔK:

What has this all got to do with resurrection?

The resurrected man is a consistent theme of the mythology that developed out of observations of a certain type of being, beginning with Osiris and ending with Christ. Fully conscious beings adept in this science can enable the radiant body to appear as an elemental body, so perfectly imprinted are its sensations on their energetic being.

Gurdjieff, likewise, connects Christianity with prehistorical Egypt:

“The Christian church, the Christian form of worship, was not invented by the fathers of the church. It was all taken in a ready-made form from Egypt, only not from the Egypt that we know but from one which we do not know. This Egypt was in the same place as the other but it existed much earlier. Only small bits of it survived in historical times, and these bits have been preserved in secret and so well that we do not even know where they have been preserved.

“It will seem strange to many people when I say that this pre-historic Egypt was Christian many thousands of years before the birth of Christ, that is to say, that its religion was composed of the same principles and ideas that constitute true Christianity. (ISOM, ch 4)

Both the Master of the Key and Gurdjieff-Ouspensky in *The Conversation* are concerned with the ancient roots of the eucharist:

How can we regain it? Is something like the Eucharist part of this science?

Christ gave the Eucharist to mankind. But the Eucharistic feast was enacted from time immemorial. It began when you still lived in the forest. When the strong died, you ate their flesh to gain their strength.

Did it work?

Don't joke with me. It was pitiful.

Is there a record of the Eucharist before Christ?

There is. (39)

“Christ knew that he must die. It had been decided thus beforehand. He knew it and his disciples knew it. And each one knew

what part he had to play. But at the same time they wanted to establish a permanent link with Christ. And for this purpose he gave them his blood to drink and his flesh to eat. It was not bread and wine at all, but real flesh and real blood.

“The Last Supper was a magical ceremony similar to ‘blood-brotherhood’ for establishing a connection between ‘astral bodies.’ But who is there who knows about this in existing religions and who understands what it means? All this has been long forgotten and everything has been given quite a different meaning. The words have remained but their meaning has long been lost.” (*ISOM*, Ch 4)

It is outside the scope of this article to give a full treatment of the influence of *Miraculous* on *The Conversation*.^[9] There are many areas of common interest as in above. But more importantly, there are instances where concepts and assertions appearing obliquely in *The Conversation* seem to find their missing context in Gurdjieff-Ouspensky. What one witnesses in *The Conversation* vis-a-vis Gurdjieff and Ouspensky is a whole spectrum of intellectual appropriation of everything from bare signifiers and metaphors up through Gurdjieffian terminology, ideas, and even an entire conceptual apparatus. Here is a brief survey:

1. MACHINES. For Gurdjieff, the human being is a kind of machine that mechanically and deterministically interacts with its environment in an ongoing give-and-take.^[10] Not even art or culture is exempt from this basic automatism, and indeed, are equally pure reflections of it. Even ordinary introspection and everyday consciousness do not exempt one from being a machine as they are deterministic events and are narrow, limited responses to the situation at a given moment.

Gurdjieff’s connection of ‘consciousness’ with ‘machine’ is fairly unique. He does not reduce consciousness to a material substratum as in modern science. Rather, while allowing for consciousness as a separate domain, he maintains nonetheless that ordinary consciousness is machine-like, unknowing, and without exceptional effort, there is no ‘whole’ to consciousness greater than its discrete parts which are swapped out moment-to-moment.

The novel and peculiar association of consciousness with the ‘machine’ appears in *The Conversation* as well. A significant part of the dialogue has to do with the differences between “intelligent machines” and “conscious machines”, and the term “machine” or “machines” appears

almost fifty times in *The Conversation*.^[11] The choice of words is rather unique as one could easily expect use of a more common term like ‘artificial intelligence’ and talk of computers becoming conscious. Instead, the Master of the Key employs a distinctively Gurdjieffian vocabulary.

2. LIFE AS PRISON. For Gurdjieff, a metaphor for the basic human predicament of being trapped in an inner and outer automatism from which an “I” must free itself and become substantial is that of the prison:

You do not realize your own situation. You are in prison. All you can wish for, if you are a sensible man, is to escape. But how escape? (*ISOM*, ch 2)

The same metaphor of human life-as-prison or being trapped is also used throughout *The Conversation*, transposed by Strieber into collective or evolutionary terms:

Why are you here?
You’re chained to the ground. (12)

The wheel of life, as it is called by the Buddhists, is your prison.
The human soul is imprisoned?
It is imprisoned. [...]
Will this ever end?
Your enemy does not want it to end. They fear you too much.
When you see UFOs, you see prison guards. (54)

We are in chains, just as you said. But you also said you had the key.
This whole conversation is the key. You should bless your jailers, because without them you could never find your freedom. When you, as a species, remember why you have been imprisoned, and you face what you did, you will be free. (55)

3. CRYSTALLIZATION. Gurdjieff’s focus on a man creating something in himself that survives constant erasure by the passage of time leads to his use of the term.

The ‘man-machine’ with whom everything depends upon external influences, with whom everything happens, who is now

one, the next moment another, and the next moment a third, has no future of any kind; he is buried and that is all. *Dust returns to dust*. This applies to him. In order to be able to speak of any kind of future life there must be a certain crystallization, a certain fusion of man's inner qualities, a certain independence of external influences. (*ISOM*, ch 1)

Gurdjieff-Ouspensky repeatedly uses the terms 'crystallize' and 'crystallization' in the context of something forming that can persist:

If a man lives without inner struggle, if everything happens in him without opposition, if he goes wherever he is drawn or wherever the wind blows, he will remain such as he is. But if a struggle begins in him, and particularly if there is a definite line in this struggle, then, gradually, permanent traits begin to form themselves, he begins to 'crystallize.' But crystallization is possible on a right foundation and it is possible on a wrong foundation. (ch 1)

"Crystallization is possible on any foundation. Take for example a brigand, a really good, genuine brigand. I knew such brigands in the Caucasus. He will stand with a rifle behind a stone by the roadside for eight hours without stirring. Could you do this? All the time, mind you, a struggle is going on in him. He is thirsty and hot, and flies are biting him; but he stands still. Another is a monk; he is afraid of the devil; all night long he beats his head on the floor and prays. Thus crystallization is achieved. [...]" (ch 1)

"If nothing is sacrificed nothing is obtained. And it is necessary to sacrifice something precious at the moment, to sacrifice for a long time and to sacrifice a great deal. But still, not forever. This must be understood because often it is not understood. Sacrifice is necessary only while the process of crystallization is going on. When crystallization is achieved, renunciations, privations, and sacrifices are no longer necessary. [...]" (ch 1)

Strieber has recourse to this special term in *The Conversation*, saying "[w]hen they die, they will see that they have crystallized imperfections in themselves by the indulgence of self-will" (48). The specific issue of crystallization in relation to the afterlife will be shown in more detail.

4. ESSENCE, TASTE, FOUNDATION. These are primary motifs in Gurdjieff-Ouspensky. Essence is a kind of deep inner character that often remains hidden beneath the more temporary, more improvised and externally driven layers of personality. And as Strieber would say in an online commentary: “In the Gurdjieff work we were always talking about essence”.^[12] Sensation and taste are major concepts in Gurdjieff-Ouspensky as well. They are linked as when Gurdjieff says that observation of one’s inner experience can only be done “by taste, by sensation” (*ISOM* ch 6) and not through representations intended for the outside world. Of the five senses, taste for Gurdjieff appears to be the exemplar of sensory perception since it measures through direct contact what is already inside the human being. In this regard, it is fundamental.

For the Master of the Key, taste, essence, and the Gurdjieffian vocabulary of “foundation” are linked:

What is essence?

Taste. The way a certain specific being tastes. Essence is foundation. (19)

5. SENSATION. For Gurdjieff, sensation can be seen as logically distinct from emotion inasmuch as sensation is objective:

Moreover, sensations can be indifferent — neither warm nor cold, neither pleasant nor unpleasant: ‘white paper,’ ‘red pencil.’ In the sensation of white or red there is nothing either pleasant or unpleasant. (*ISOM*, ch 6)

Accordingly, the Master of the Key says: “Objective sensation is consciousness” (26). This is said in the context of a discussion of meditation:

But let me rephrase it in the terminology of this more informed age: the purpose of meditation is twofold. It is to organize the energetic body so that it will not lose its integrity after it can no longer depend upon the structure of the elemental body for its form. Then also, and in an interconnected manner, it is to fill the energetic body with objective sensation. Objective sensation is consciousness. You are within life, but not entirely absorbed in life. Part of you observes yourself from a distance. [...] (26)

This constellation of ideas is pure Gurdjieff. For one, the emphasis

on objective sensation as a target for the attention in meditation is a well-known part of ‘the work’.^[13] But even more importantly, the willful ‘filling’ of the consciousness with objective sensation recommended involves and produces a kind of redoubled structure of consciousness (“[y]ou are within life, but not entirely absorbed in life”). The redoubled consciousness is described elsewhere in *The Conversation*:

Any specific recommendations?

Paying attention to physical sensation is paying attention to energetic sensation. Being awake to oneself and one’s surroundings increases the intensity of the impressions so that they affect the spin of the electrons that are present in the nervous system. In this context, being awake means being aware of one’s own self while at the same time absorbing impressions from the outside.
[...] (17)

This redoubled structure of consciousness whereby one perpetually tries to include oneself within oneself through self-remembering, of course, comes from Gurdjieff:

“It has been explained before that in ordinary conditions of life we do not remember ourselves; we do not remember, that is, we do not feel ourselves, are not aware of ourselves at the moment of a perception, of an emotion, of a thought or of an action. If a man understands this and tries to remember himself, every impression he receives while remembering himself will, so to speak, be doubled. [...] (ISOM, ch 9)

Strieber in his own inimitable way discusses these ideas in his third audio commentary on *The Key*, using Gurdjieff-Ouspensky as supporting evidence for the ideas of the Master of the Key without any recognition or acknowledgment that the ideas come from Gurdjieff-Ouspensky:

So returning again and again to the place of objectivity and centering where I look out at the world around me and I see that I am part of it but I am also apart from it. There’s a kind of a double arrow of consciousness of Gurdjieff—er, P. D. Ouspensky describes in his wonderful book *In Search of the Miraculous*. You have in other words a larger vision. When the Master of the Key was speaking of the angels having a larger vision that included

all worlds, it meant that they could experience the same process of sensation of all of the universe at once [...]^[14]

Strieber related sensation and the double arrow of attention in a January 1997 interview with Jeff Rense.^[15]

What I got from my experience with the Gurdjieff Foundation was the ability to meditate and the understanding that placing the attention on the body and dividing the attention between physical sensation and what's going on in the mind is a tremendously beneficial thing to do. It's really enriching. And I've been doing that now for thirty years. And it's very, very worthwhile.

And Strieber was talking about placing attention on the body in the Gurdjieffian manner as far back as *Communion*:

It was so extraordinarily clear. I was in a panic. I couldn't live with this image perpetually reminding me of the visitors' enigmatic presence in my life.

I went into my office and sat on the floor, going deed into a state of meditation. I drew my concentration to my body, directing my attention to my physical center of gravity just below the navel, and away from my racing mind. (Four)

6. ELEMENTS. One of the more idiosyncratic parts of *Miraculous* is Gurdjieff's teaching on the 'elements'. Referring to certain chemical elements, for example, hydrogen and oxygen, Gurdjieff conceives of his elements in an esoteric way as substances manifesting particular functions.

This Gurdjieffian vocabulary is retained in *The Conversation* where the term "elemental" is used throughout to denote roughly the same thing as the "physical" though far more frequently than "physical" (41 times vs 29 times). One reads frequently therefore of the "elemental body". Indeed, perhaps the most basic distinction in *The Conversation* is that which is made between the "elemental" and the "energetic", choosing these terms specifically and eschewing more conventional pairings like material and energetic, material and immaterial, physical and metaphysical, any of these pairings reflecting a less Gurdjieffian vocabulary.

7. FOUR LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS. The Master of the Key is quite explicit that the human being has four possible levels of consciousness:

We are animals?

A true human being has four levels of mind. Most of you have only three, and perhaps a vestige of the fourth. [...] (22)

It is perhaps no surprise that for Gurdjieff-Ouspensky, there are also four levels of consciousness: “In all there are four states of consciousness possible for man” (*ISOM*, ch 8). For both Gurdjieff and the Master of the Key, the lower three are routinely used, but one should aspire to the fourth.

For the Master of the Key the “vestige” of the fourth is the “organ of higher consciousness” which consists of a “tiny layer of electrons that lies outside of the skin” which is “an organ in itself just like the eyes or the blood” (23). The tiny layer of electrons is in superposition and can receive visual impressions that the brain can deliver “to the area of the brain closest to the pineal gland”, a vestigial organ. In order to activate this fourth level of consciousness, one must engage in classic Gurdjieffian redoubling:

You must be able to watch and not watch at the same time.
When you learn this, it will stay in superposition even as you take the imagery that it is receiving into your brain and process it. (23)

For Gurdjieff, the fourth state of consciousness or “objective consciousness” is experienced in ordinary life only in “flashes”, for example, in mystical states. But with effort and practice it can be experienced in a more lasting way. In a sense, the concept combines sensation and an extra-temporal orientation in which there is no longer a subjective point of departure for consciousness. Thanks to a sufficiently strong self-remembering, the self is no longer bolted onto each passing moment, again and again saying “I” to each fleeting thought or fragment of experience. Instead, it has itself become a kind of greater object held together by the power of attention.

8. OUSPENSKY'S FOUR-DIMENSIONALITY. One of the more remarkable imports into *The Conversation* comes not from Gurdjieff, but Ouspensky. Ouspensky, a mathematician, was fascinated with the

problem of higher dimensionality, a new and exciting domain in the closing years of the nineteenth century made famous by Einstein at the start of the twentieth.

Miraculous contains many attempts by Ouspensky to link this burgeoning area of interest to Gurdjieff's teaching. Ouspensky had already written a book, *Tertium Organum*, exploring higher dimensionality and the idea that time is a fourth dimension of space. In his subsequent book *A New Model of the Universe*, Ouspensky devoted a full chapter to this special concept of time as a kind of space — a concept discussed again in *Miraculous*.

Two clear instances of Ouspensky's influence in this vein appear in *The Conversation*. The first is a favorite thought experiment of Ouspensky's presented in *New Model*. First how it appears in *The Conversation*:

[...] *Am I right?*

You are, but that is a three-dimensional view, and thus limited by the limits of three-dimensional vision. Remember the analogy of how the two-dimensional being sees a solid object. As a ball passes through the flat plane on which such a being would be confined, it would not see the real shape, or even be able to conceive of it. By definition, a two-dimensional being cannot look up, for then it would see into the third dimension, which is impossible for it to do. What it would see, always looking straight ahead, would be a dot that would grow into a line, then slowly contract again into a dot and disappear. It would never understand the true nature of the ball, because its two-dimensional mind cannot contain the concept of a solid object. (50)

In Ouspensky's *New Model* it is put a slightly different way:

Let us again imagine a world of plane-beings possessing only two dimensions, length and breadth, and inhabiting a flat surface. [...] If a cube is placed on his plane, then this cube will appear to him in the form of the four lines bounding the square touching his plane. Of the whole cube only this square will exist for him. He will be unable even to imagine the rest of the cube. The cube will not exist for him. ^[16]

For Strieber the object is a ball and for Ouspensky a cube. But two things are worth noting: first, there can be no question that Strieber

had ample reason to explore Ouspensky's work while a member of the Gurdjieff group. Second, Ouspensky's discussion in *New Model* about the perception of three-dimensional objects by two-dimensional beings occurs in the context of Ouspensky's attempt to establish a scientific basis for supernatural phenomena — the same mission as that of *The Key*.

Ouspensky's very peculiar notion of time-as-fourth dimension being another dimension of space forms an important backdrop to the Master of the Key's "new vision" in *The Conversation*. This is the second and more important way Ouspensky's influence shows. The notion appears repeatedly in *The Conversation* and underpins the "new vision".

Today, higher dimensionality is routinely discussed in terms of n spatial dimensions plus one dimension of time. But Ouspensky did not view time as a separate dimension of change applied to any given and finite set of spatial dimensions. Rather, time was just another form of space and if seen from a higher dimensional perspective it would appear every bit as much an 'object' as a three-dimensional object does to us. Ouspensky argues against today's more commonly held view in *Tertium Organum*:

We have to admit that by the one term, time, we actually designate two ideas – the idea of a 'certain space' and the idea of 'movement in that space'. But in actual fact this movement does not exist; it only appears to exist because we do not see the space of time. This means that the sensation of motion in time (and there is no motion that is not in time) arises in us because we look at the world through a narrow slit, as it were, and only see the lines of intersection of the plane of time with our three-dimensional space. (ch 3)

Since time is not simply a neutral domain in which change occurs for some n -dimensional spatial realm, but rather, change itself as we perceive it is the manifestation of a certain kind of higher spatiality, time is not simply the succession of discrete events:

If a multi-coloured cube passes through the plane, the whole cube and its motion will be perceived by the plane being as changes in the colour of the lines lying on the surface. So, if a blue line replaces a red one, the plane being will regard the red line as a past event. He will be unable to conceive of the red line still existing somewhere. He will say that the line is the same

but that it has become blue owing to certain causes of a physical nature. If the cube starts moving backwards and the red line again replaces the blue line, it will be a new phenomenon for the plane being. He will say that the line has become red again.

Everything situated above and below, if the plane is horizontal, or to the right and left if the plane is vertical, will lie in time for a being living on that plane, that is, it will be in the past and the future. Everything that exists in reality outside the plane will be regarded as non-existent: either as already in the past, i.e. as something that has vanished, ceased to be, something that will never return; or in the future, i.e. as something not yet existing, not manifested but merely potential. (ch 6)

Accordingly, past and future are not two different modes of temporal non-existence — they both exist:

The past and the future cannot be non-existent, for, if they do not exist, the present does not exist either. They must exist together somewhere, only we do not see them. (ch 4)

And Ouspensky imagines a consciousness able to step outside of its limitation and see past and future simultaneously:

Imagine a consciousness not limited by the conditions of sense-perception. Such a consciousness can rise above the plane on which we move; it can see far beyond the bounds of the circle illumined by our ordinary consciousness; it can see that not only does the line along which we move exist, but also all other lines perpendicular to it which we now cross, or have ever crossed before, or shall cross later. Rising above the plane this consciousness will be able to see the plane, make sure that it actually is a plane and not only a line. Then it will be able to see the past and the future lying side by side and existing simultaneously. (ch 4)

For the Master of the Key, time is thought of in the same spatial terms. Man's "effort to know God" is a kind of spatial object, a "single form", and all of collective human life is present as a moment on a sort of Ouspenskian higher-dimensional object. The Master of the Key, of course, is able to perceive the higher dimensions and thus frequently uses the phrase "outside of time":

What is real religion?

From outside of time, man's effort to know God appears as a single form, a work of art that has evolved across history. [...] (42)

You describe our historical effort to know God as a work of art. What do you mean?

You are weaving a tapestry of living memories. This is what the body of man is — a great weave of shimmering, living cloth. It is full of all the hopes, failures, fears and attainments of the ages. Every detail is there, every step taken by every foot upon every path, not just the acts of Buddha or Christ or the great leaders. Nothing has been forgotten, not the single drawing of a single breath. All lives are all completely present in this work of art. (43)

Collectively, as seen from “outside of time, man's effort to know God appears as a single form”, but this is also true for every detail of an individual's life:

First, outside of time, all events are one, so they happen simultaneously. Not that they have happened, but that they are always happening. Every moment is forever, as you will recall after you die and begin to live in your memories. You will see the importance, then, of living a life that satisfies you and fulfills your destiny, because everything you have done will be immediately present in your consciousness all the time. (50)

No detail is lost for individuals:

Energy is eternal, so the part of you that is energy is eternal. What has been hard for you to understand is that the speed at which these electrons move and the pattern of their movement carries the taste of your being and the memory of your lives. Each one carries a different fraction of the whole. There are trillions of electrons in a single elemental body, and they contain a detailed memory of every second of life. This is why, for example, when certain areas of the brain are probed, the physical buffering mechanism can be paralyzed, causing the memories stored in this way to flood into the chemical cells. The person then has stunningly detailed recall of past events, as if the moments were being lived again. Nothing of your life is forgotten, or of all your

lives. When you are dead, you are your whole self, in every detail. The things about yourself that you cannot bear and suppress now are entirely and completely present to you and to all others. The dead have no privacy, and the living have no privacy from them. The dead see everything that you do. It is part of their task to bear the errors and enjoy the triumphs of the living. (42)

Strieber's Ouspenskian understanding of time clearly informs his vision of what the 'life' of the dead is like with every detail exposed and each being present as his "whole self", with the soul again as a kind of Ouspenskian object composed of all past lives seen from outside of time.

9. DATE AND TIME OF DEATH. An unusual detail also gleaned from Ouspensky appears in the material surrounding *The Key*. In *Miraculous*, Ouspensky had a personal concern with knowing the "day and hour" of his death, and raised the issue with Gurdjieff:

A great deal was connected for me with this question. I considered, for instance, that a man can know, and has a right to know, exactly how much time is left to him, how much time he has at his disposal, or, in other words, he can and has a right to know the day and hour of his death. I always thought it humiliating for a man to live without knowing this and I decided at one time not to begin doing anything in any sense whatever until I did know it. (ch 6)

Strieber, like Ouspensky, too, wants to know the "day and hour" of his death. And in his very first *Journal* entry on the 'true encounter', Strieber is given the date and time of his death:

He told me when and how I am to die, but he also said, "if you value your sanity, you will never utter this." I can certainly see that. But I sense the truth of what he said, and I think that I have gained the peace of a dying man.^[17]

Strieber referred to it again in his interview with Sean Casteel:

There was one thing that was fairly extraordinary. He told me the date of my death. And he said, "But you must keep this a secret, because if you tell anyone, then it is possible that it will

change.” And that is very true. Because if I told that and it became public knowledge, maybe someone would decide to change it just to prove me wrong. You know, and blow my brains out. ^[18]

One could easily ask based on this whether the ‘true encounter’ was not the staging of an encounter with a Gurdjieff-like figure drawing on Ouspensky’s account and even some of Ouspensky’s personal concerns.

10. WORDS OF THE MASTER OF THE KEY. We have seen how in the Tarcher ΔK , whether reflecting an early version or a revision, the Master of the Key responds to a naive question in the same way that Gurdjieff was said by Ouspensky to have answered a question that irritated him: “I don’t know, I wasn’t there”.

Other similarities exist in how the Master of the Key and Gurdjieff communicate. For example, both offer pronouncements about science and the state of human knowledge:

Although you do not presently understand the true meaning of indeterminacy, what you refer to as quantum physics offers a useful partial view of the inner workings of the physical world. Quantum instruments of communication, as your scientists now understand them, depend upon the entanglement of particles. [...] (21)

Look into your astrophysics texts. You will find that your science does not understand the darkness. (49)

The Master of the Key speaks as an outsider, calling “what you refer to as quantum physics” a “useful partial view” as if the label may be inadequate and the full picture quite different. He also makes reference to “your” science, underlining he is an outsider to human affairs.

Gurdjieff expresses himself in the same way:

“Yes,” said G. “In many cases these substances are those which you call ‘narcotics’. But they can be used in entirely different ways. There are schools which make use of narcotics in the right way. [...] The substances used in these schools are not merely ‘narcotics’ as you call them, although many of them are prepared from such drugs as opium, hashish, and so on. (ch 1)

[I]n chemistry the periodic system of the elements is without doubt closely connected with the principle of octaves although this connection is still not fully clear to science. (ch 7)

Gurdjieff speaks of “those [substances] which you call ‘narcotics’” as if the term may be inadequate, and relates knowledge that is obvious to him but “not yet fully clear to science”. Thus both Gurdjieff and the Master of the Key try to speak as ‘masters’ positioning themselves outside existing human knowledge using the same type of language.

Compelling also are the similarities in the descriptions of their speaking styles. According to Strieber, describing how the Master of the Key spoke:

[41:50] There was something about the way it worked that... everything that was said, every word that was said had kind of freight with it. It had, it seems to me, almost an infinity of meaning. And there were also some words used that I cannot remember.

They were sort of like hyperdimensional words. [...] What people used to call words of power. And they affected me when he uttered them. [...] At the time I even noticed that some of them weren’t in English, at least not English as I understand it. But later I realized that there were some words that had contained whole vast complicated ideas.^[19]

Something of the same concept of exploded meaning is retained in the 2001 Walker & Collier, though like the Master of the Key’s appearance it has been rendered more conventional (5):

He said, “I am here on behalf of the good. Please give me some time.”

The word “good,” the way he said it, exploded in my heart like an emotion-packed hydrogen bomb. It wasn’t just the tone, it was the look that melted across his face as he uttered it, an expression of love so strong and so absolutely impeccable that I just gasped.

In *Miraculous*, Ouspensky describes Gurdjieff as speaking in a fashion similar to that of Strieber’s Master of the Key. After a few pages of conversation related by Ouspensky in which Gurdjieff has been emphasizing particular words in an unusual way, Ouspensky says:

G.'s words, in addition to their ordinary meaning, undoubtedly contained another, altogether different, meaning. I had already begun to realize that, in order to arrive at this hidden meaning in G.'s words, one had to begin with their usual and simple meaning. G.'s words were always significant in their ordinary sense, although this was not the whole of their significance. The wider or deeper significance remained hidden for a long time. (ch 1)

It is worth noting that this kind of exploded meaning is described by Strieber in *Communion* coming from the visitors:

I remember that they would say words, and each word they said would go through me like a hurricane, evoking every memory, drought, and feeling associated with it. (Four)

Likewise, both the Master of the Key and Gurdjieff seem able to communicate telepathically. While Strieber is hesitant to call what happened in the conversation telepathy, he says nonetheless that the Master of the Key had access to his mind and vice versa:

The thing is that every word he said seemed to have attached to it thousands of ideas. And I have in my head now the contents. I mean, it's like having the contents of somebody else's mind in your own mind. Or at least part of it. ^[20]

ML: You mentioned that he communicated in a very strange and powerful way. Can you elaborate? Was it telepathic?

WS: He had access to my mind in ways that were really unusual. It wasn't exactly like telepathy, but some of the words he said, I can't repeat. I don't know how. ^[21]

In Chapter Thirteen of *Miraculous*, Ouspensky describes an occasion when Gurdjieff began communicating to him inside his own mind:

And with this the miracle began. [...]

It all started with my beginning to hear his thoughts. We were sitting in a small room with a carpetless wooden floor as it happens in country houses. I sat opposite G., and Dr. S. and Z. at either side. G. spoke of our "features," of our inability to see or to speak the truth. His words perturbed me very much. And

suddenly I noticed that among the words which he was saying to us all there were “thoughts” which were intended for me. I caught one of these thoughts and replied to it, speaking aloud in the ordinary way. G. nodded to me and stopped speaking. There was a fairly long pause. He sat still saying nothing. After a while I heard his voice inside me as it were in the chest near the heart. He put a definite question to me. I looked at him; he was sitting and smiling. His question provoked in me a very strong emotion. But I answered him in the affirmative. [...]

And he at once put another still more difficult question to me in the same way as before. And I again answered it in a natural voice. Z. and S. were visibly astonished at what was taking place, especially Z. This conversation, if it can be called a conversation, proceeded in this fashion for not less than half an hour. G. put questions to me without words and I answered them speaking in the usual way. I was very agitated by the things G. said to me and the things he asked me which I cannot transmit.

11. LIFE AS 'ORGAN' OF THE PLANET. In *The Conversation*, Strieber writes: “Life is ubiquitous. It is a part of the essential structure of reality—the nervous system, as it were, of the body of God” (46) and “Living bodies are the consciousness of the planet. Man is earth’s mind” (30), as well as:

Why is life so common?

Because perception is essential to the structure of the universe. If a thing is not perceived, it doesn’t have form. Life is thus the mechanism that gives form to nature. (46)

Compare to Gurdjieff in *Miraculous*:

Organic life represents so to speak the earth’s organ of perception. (ch 7)

12. THE TAROT. In *Miraculous*, Ouspensky mentions his personal interest in the Tarot:

What I heard interested me very much for it connected G.’s system with the system of the Tarot, which had seemed to me at one time to be a possible key to hidden knowledge. Moreover it

showed me a relation of three to four which was new to me and which I had not been able to understand from the Tarot. The Tarot is definitely constructed upon the law of four principles. (ch 5)

Ouspensky has a chapter in *A New Model of the Universe* on the Tarot called *The Symbolism of the Tarot*, in which invoking Raymond Lully, Ouspensky calls the Tarot a “philosophical machine”, and in which he expresses his preferences for the Tarot of Marseilles, focusing entirely on it.

In 2002, Strieber brought out *The Path* under his Walker & Collier imprint, a book devoted to a way of laying out Tarot cards in the shape of a cross akin to Ouspensky’s “four principles”. Strieber, too, favors the Tarot of Marseilles, and *The Path* was even dedicated to Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, and a variety of Gurdjieffians including some of Strieber’s teachers.

The Path is a questionable book given its errors and doubtful assertions. Strieber writes in *The Path* that Gurdjieff called the Tarot a “philosophical machine” when it was Ouspensky. Strieber expresses his strong conviction that the Tarot goes back to the Roman empire while admitting there is no real evidence. To support his feelings about the Tarot’s antiquity, Strieber erroneously claims that an 11th-century sculpture at a basilica near Toulouse, France, has a depiction identical to that of the major arcana card ‘the World’, whereas instead it is a representation of “Christ in Majesty,” with Jesus on his throne surrounded by the four creatures described in the Book of Revelation.^[22]

The Path is even more problematic when it comes to its origins. The book is clearly Strieber’s version of Gurdjieff applied to the Tarot. Along the way describes his experiences in the New York City Gurdjieff group, how he was taught to meditate in the group, and so on. Yet Strieber cannot bring himself to credit his experiences with the Gurdjieff group as the basis for his personal system of Tarot interpretation. Instead, the origin of his method is more fantastically: the Master of the Key. Recall that in Strieber’s first account of his ‘true encounter’, the main purpose of the discussion was to re-acquaint Strieber with the important “path” that he would have a role in bringing to the world:

There emerged an incredible promise: that an ancient path would again emerge. And suddenly I knew who this man was. Since I met one of them in 1971, I have known that there was an incredible secret group in this world, who knew the true path of

the human soul. He told me then I would one day play a part in inducing this hidden path to resurface. He taught it to me, and I committed it to memory. I asked what I should do with it? He only shook his head.

In *The Path* Strieber claims that his system was given to him by the Master of the Key not long after he had joined the Gurdjieff Foundation in the nineteen-seventies:

During this exciting time in my life, I had what would turn out to be an experience of great significance for me, that has colored my life ever since.

In retrospect, it seems so simple. Even though I have always remembered somebody being associated with it, only a few seconds seemed to be involved.

It was a Saturday, just before noon. I had been sitting in the small study in our apartment, clattering away at my typewriter. The deck of Tarot cards that lies on my desk beside my computer as I write this now, lay on my desk beside my typewriter then.

I paused from my writing and began to look through the Tarot deck. I didn't even know exactly why I'd bought it. Old and weathered now, it was pristine then, the now-worn cards fresh and new.

I got up and went into the living room. In what seemed like just the moment as I moved through the door between the two rooms, something completely new to me suddenly appeared in my mind. The entire Tarot deck was laid out there, in a vivid image that in seconds focused into an idea. I went to the couch and sat down. I couldn't imagine what had just happened. Had there been somebody here? I had the sense that somebody had been talking to me, that we'd been together for a long time. And yet, it also seemed as if I'd just stepped from room to room.

Many years later, when I far more practiced at coping with such events, I would meet this mysterious somebody again in 1998, and would come away with the memories that led to the creation of *The Key* in 2001. (*The Value of the Path*)

Of course, a very different account of all this appears in *Communion*:

About fifteen years ago I became interested in the tarot when

I was studying the rise of monasticism in Europe for a historical novel I never actually wrote. I came to realize that the tarot is much more than a deck of fortune-telling cards; it is a sort philosophical machine that presents its ideas in the form of pictures rather than words.

The story it tells is an interesting one: The face cards of the tarot — the Major Arcana — can be arranged in such a manner that they work as signposts toward spiritual evolution. [...] (Six)

The appearance of the term “philosophical machine” here is an indicator that neither a meeting with the Master of the Key nor research on a novel were behind Strieber’s introduction to the Tarot. Rather, Strieber had been reading Ouspensky.

13. NOT ALL HAVE SOULS. The points of correspondence between *Miraculous* and *The Conversation* are undeniable — and again, what is presented here is not a complete list. But while there is overlap in terms of linguistic raw material, metaphors chosen, concepts and terminology — and even a recasting of three world religions as “one system in three” by way of a Gurdjieffian triad — these cases of intellectual appropriation, though significant in number, are nothing compared to the wholesale re-purposing of Gurdjieff-Ouspensky in the Master of the Key’s description of how not all human beings have souls, though with effort one can develop one and continue after death.

In *Miraculous*, Gurdjieff puts it in terms of the astral body:

You know what the expression ‘astral body’ means. But the systems with which you are acquainted and which use this expression state that all men have an ‘astral body.’ This is quite wrong. What may be called the ‘astral body’ is obtained by means of fusion, that is, by means of terribly hard inner work and struggle. Man is not born with it. And only very few men acquire an ‘astral body.’ If it is formed it may continue to live after the death of the physical body, and it may be born again in another physical body. This is ‘reincarnation.’ If it is not re-born, then, in the course of time, it also dies; it is not immortal but it can live long after the death of the physical body. (ch 2)

In *The Conversation*, this same curious notion — that human beings do not automatically have souls, but they may be acquired through “hard

inner work and struggle”—is presented by the Master of the Key, this time using the term ‘radiant body’. The Master of the Key even has a Gurdjieffian remedy:

I am trying to find out our relationship to it.

Not all human beings are radiant bodies. But all may become such.

You are saying that we don’t all have souls?

I am saying that you are not all discreet radiant beings, but all participate to some degree or other in conscious energy. To remain a separate being after death, there must exist the ability to maintain the structure of the radiant body by the action of attention. This is why we have been so insistent that you meditate. Otherwise, we will lose you when you die and we don’t want that. If a being cannot self-maintain after the elemental body no longer does it automatically, it is absorbed into the flux of conscious energy. You go into the light, as it were. (16–17)

The repackaging of Gurdjieff in *The Conversation* here is important because it forms the entire basis for the description of the life and death of consciousness in the dialogue. It is as if the intellectual edifice of Gurdjieff-Ouspensky has been stripped, its structure exposed, and on that structure a new doctrine attached that is part-Catholic, part-New Age, part-UFO lore.

Recall that for Gurdjieff, the “I” is basically nothing but the site of a constant action/reaction from moment to moment:

“Our starting point is that man does not know himself, that he is *not*” (he emphasized these words), “that is, he is not what he can and what he should be. For this reason he cannot make any agreements or assume any obligations. He can decide nothing in regard to the future. Today he is one person and tomorrow another. (ch 1)

Moreover, this automatic identification with each passing moment means for Gurdjieff that there is no “I” in any true sense, and that man is basically asleep:

“Taken in itself, a man’s being has many different sides. The most characteristic feature of a modern man is the *absence of*

unity in him and, further, the absence in him of even traces of those properties which he most likes to ascribe to himself, that is, 'lucid consciousness,' 'free will,' a 'permanent ego or I,' and the 'ability to do.' It may surprise you if I say that the chief feature of a modern man's being which explains *everything else that is lacking in him is sleep.*" (ch 4)

Man can be said to undergo annihilation — a kind of death — with each passing moment because nothing of him survives. Now consider that in *Miraculous*, Gurdjieff is asked whether anyone or any part of a person can survive death in the usual sense. Here is his answer:

On one occasion, at one of these meetings, someone asked about the possibility of reincarnation, and whether it was possible to believe in cases of communication with the dead.

"Many things are possible," said G. "But it is necessary to understand that man's being, both in life and after death, if it does exist after death, may be very different in quality. The 'man-machine' with whom everything depends upon external influences, with whom everything happens, who is now one, the next moment another, and the next moment a third, has no future of any kind; he is buried and that is all. *Dust returns to dust.* This applies to him. In order to be able to speak of any kind of future life there must be a certain crystallization, a certain fusion of man's inner qualities, a certain independence of external influences. If there is anything in a man able to resist external influences, then this very thing itself may also be able to resist the death of the physical body. But think for yourselves what there is to withstand physical death in a man who faints or forgets everything when he cuts his finger? If there is anything in a man, it may survive; if there is nothing, then there is nothing to survive. But even if something survives, its future can be very varied. In certain cases of fuller crystallization what people call 'reincarnation' may be possible after death, and, in other cases, what people call 'existence on the other side.' (ch 2)

Gurdjieff leaves the door open for something of a human being to survive physical death, but he remains within his overall problematic of how anything of an "I" can survive its death from moment to moment. This means, of course, that for Gurdjieff, his solution for surviving the

death of the physical body is the same as his more direct concern of whether man exists at all during life: the same redoubled structure of consciousness which through effort and attention one is able to reach “objective consciousness” by self-remembering. Without this self-remembering, one is condemned to life as a “man-machine”, succumbing to death.

This door having been left open by Gurdjieff, Strieber walks through it presenting the same prescriptions in *The Key*. Strieber reorients the conceptual apparatus of Gurdjieff toward the problem of physical death, of course, because Strieber is above all preoccupied with the soul, reincarnation, and so on. A short overview:

1. For Gurdjieff, the “I”, for being fragmentary, suffers a kind of ongoing death unless through effort and attention it builds something able to last. For Strieber, “who does not meditate disintegrates” and lives on after death only as a set of fragments:

But most of you, in the state of death, bear only fragmentary bits of what you were in life. Simple patterns, weak spin, no clear form to the radiant body and no ability to maintain it. You are subject to a process of recurrence so powerful that there are none from the distant past, except the radiant. (19)

2. For Gurdjieff, the man who is not able to build something of himself able to survive the annihilating death of each passing moment is “asleep”. He haunts a sort of place between life and death. He does not live life as a real man, but instead as an automaton. Man’s goal therefore is to become “awake”. For Strieber, a person who does not meditate and is not able to build something of himself to survive physical death goes into the “light” and thus remains asleep:

[...] You will find your dead in the immediate surroundings of their lives, for the most part, clinging to what they can of their memories, attempting to preserve their selves despite the magnetic attraction of what would envelop them.

So the light is not our friend?

The light is the fate of sleeping man. Awakened man makes his own light, as part of the radiant choir who sing forever the song of God, which is the word. (18)

3. For Gurdjieff, the creation of an “I” that lasts involves developing

the attention. One directs the attention to oneself, and by holding that attention on oneself, that self is able to live on — to construct a unity from the process of pure fragmentation that is life. This direction of the attention into oneself is called “self-remembering”. For Strieber, maintaining oneself properly in life using objective consciousness and the power of attention allows one to ‘carry’ all the details of his life into death so that there he is not just a machine-like sum of parts.

Remember this: if you do not watch, you do not see, and what you do not see does not impart any change in spin to the electrons that make up the energetic body. The parts of your life that you do not see are not carried with you into ecstasy, and it is ecstasy upon which the formation of the radiant body depends.[...]

Why do we have elemental bodies?

They are essential to growth. The aim of mankind is to enter ecstasy. But to do this, you must be at once fully realized—that is, to carry with you into death all of your potential harvest of experience—and to be objectively conscious of this experience—not to be weighted with recriminations and regrets. (26)

4. For Gurdjieff the lack of self-remembering in daily life entails a kind of amnesia or forgetfulness as one is constantly put under erasure in the passage of time. Its opposite is “self-remembering”. For the Master of the Key, incarnating in a physical body means a forgetfulness or amnesia of all past-life experience owing to being within the time-stream:

Could we ever be rescued, if we destroy the earth before we were finished perfecting ourselves?

Nobody can change except inside the stream of time. Outside of it nothing changes. Nothing can. We enter the time stream by inserting our energetic bodies into elemental bodies on this planet of which we were born. (33)

And we lost access to the science of God—your science?

The part of your brain that enables you to utilize electrons without drawing them into the particulate state was turned off. You became time-bound. You went to sleep, sinking into the time stream, which is where you remain trapped. (56)

For both human life is an experience of fragmentation and a form of “self-remembering” is the antidote. For Gurdjieff, the fragmentation to be overcome happens in life; for the Master of the Key, it manifests most in physical death.

5. In ‘the work’, one learns to develop the attention by directing it into the body and into physical sensation.^[23] The Master of the Key provides exactly this kind of encouragement in *The Conversation* with Strieber never indicating that he has heard this before, that Gurdjieff had said the same thing, and so on:

Any specific recommendations?

Paying attention to physical sensation is paying attention to energetic sensation. Being awake to oneself and one’s surroundings increases the intensity of the impressions so that they affect the spin of the electrons that are present in the nervous system. In this context, being awake means being aware of one’s own self while at the same time absorbing impressions from the outside. The increase in spin and enrichment of the complexity of the pattern of being that results brings more and more form to the radiant body. You will remember yourself after your death—who and what you were, why you existed, and what you intend for your future. You will, in short, acquire a true aim, and join the companions of God in their journey toward ecstatic and conscious union with one another and all that is. (17–18)

Of course, the preoccupation with finding a “true aim” is itself very Gurdjieffian. The Master of the Key provides a complicated Gurdjieffian prescription here involving divided attention and focusing on physical sensation.

The Conversation recreates what is, if anything, the central problematic of the Gurdjieff work — how to survive the death that the “I” undergoes with each passing moment — by altering a single term. The “death” of the ego is swapped out for the “death” of the physical body. The rest of the surrounding conceptual territory with its many implications along with Gurdjieff’s prescriptions for how to survive this death through work with attention and so on, remains as-is, the meaning of different terms only slightly altered.

What can one make of Strieber’s use of Gurdjieff in *The Conversation*? On the one hand, the Master of the Key’s description of an “I” that survives death through effort is so transparently Gurdjieff as seen through

the eyes of someone preoccupied with reincarnation and the soul that it instantly communicates two things: one, Strieber's intellectual integrity is open to question for taking a core problematic of another thinker and re-purposing it in such a way without attribution; and two, even more severely as it relates to intellectual integrity, that the Master of the Key's "new vision" is not so new, but is Gurdjieff to such a significant degree that it raises obvious questions about the 'true encounter'.

Is this straightforward intellectual plagiarism? There is a sort of unknowing quality to the appropriation of Gurdjieff in *The Conversation*. It is visible in the Tarcher when the Master of the Key answers a naive question "What did the word sound like?" with "I don't know, I wasn't there". The answer "I don't know, I wasn't there" is not memorable by itself. It conveys no particular insight and none of the "authority" that Strieber has several times imputed to the Master of the Key. But as words associated with another master — Gurdjieff — from a book Strieber had read in which a student similarly asks his 'master' a naive and possibly irritating question, the association and the appropriation suddenly make sense. After all, there is already more than a little resemblance between Gurdjieff and the Master of the Key in other respects.

To give Strieber anything like a charitable reading when it comes to the undeniable presence of Gurdjieff in *The Conversation*, we would have to overlook that Strieber recast the Gurdjieffian problematic of the death of the "I" as the death of the physical body. We might then be able to see the abundant Gurdjieffian language used by the Master of the Key in *The Conversation* as the Master of the Key speaking to Strieber in a vocabulary he could understand and that Strieber somehow did not notice. But this would mean overlooking the fact that Strieber spent some thirteen years in intensive practice with a Gurdjieff group, a major portion of his life, making it all the more surprising that nowhere in *The Conversation* is there any acknowledgment by Strieber that he is hearing Gurdjieff. One would also have to overlook the subtle but undeniable linguistic influences of *Miraculous* on *The Conversation* that suggest an author scouring his mind for raw material (e.g. "I don't know, I wasn't there"). One would also have to forget the broad and unlikely similarities between the figure of the Master of the Key and Gurdjieff in *Miraculous* when it comes to their rhetorical choices, the strange multivalent effects of their words, and their possibly telepathic communication.

But is there really reason to think that Strieber could completely fail to acknowledge he was hearing ideas with which he was familiar when presented with those ideas during a 'true encounter'?

STRIEBER'S HOLOGRAM: MICHAEL TALBOT

God, then, is in the fragments?

God is like a hologram. The whole is fully present in every fragment, no matter how small.

So the whole of God is in the tip of my finger?

The whole of God is in a grain of sand. In a single electron. A quark.

I had not thought of God as a hologram before. (32)

THE PROBLEM is that Strieber had in fact encountered the idea of God-as-hologram before. Strieber was featured in a 1991 book called *The Holographic Universe* by Michael Talbot. Strieber was friends with Talbot, and according to Strieber had known him since the early nineteen-eighties. Strieber devoted a chapter in his own 1995 book *Breakthrough* to Talbot called *Michael's Gift* describing a vision Strieber had of Talbot being taken away to hell after Talbot's death. While the reason for Talbot's damnation is not directly given, Strieber relates cheerfully elsewhere in the chapter that Talbot was a homosexual, raising the question of whether that vision was not another instance of Strieber's lifelong Catholicism finding expression. Whatever the case, there can be no question that Strieber had acquainted himself with the concept of the holographic universe since in *Breakthrough* he wrote:

The Holographic Universe had been published in 1991, and he hadn't let me read any of it beforehand, but when I finally got a copy of the book, I had devoured it in a single sitting.

And Talbot discusses the God-as-hologram idea in the same chapter where Strieber is discussed:

But are we being dreamed by a single divine intelligence, by God, or are we being dreamed by the collective consciousness of all things—by all the electrons, Z particles, butterflies, neutron stars, sea cucumbers, human and nonhuman intelligences in the universe? Here again we collide headlong into the bars of our own conceptual limitations, for in a holographic universe this question is meaningless. We cannot ask if the part is creating the whole, or the whole is creating the part because the part is the whole. So whether we call the collective consciousness of

all things “God,” or simply “the consciousness of all things,” it doesn’t change the situation. The universe is sustained by an act of such stupendous and ineffable creativity that it simply cannot be reduced to such terms. Again it is a self-reference cosmology. Or as the Kalahari Bushmen so eloquently put it, “The dream is dreaming itself.” (THU 285)

The concept of the hologram is central to *The Conversation*. For a complete discussion of the many points of overlap between Talbot’s *The Holographic Universe* and *The Conversation*, one should see the essay entitled *Michael Talbot and The Key*. The influence of Talbot on *The Conversation* is hard to deny. For example, Talbot took the view that new theories like the holographic universe should seek to:

[...] solve some mysteries that have never before been explainable by Science and even establish the paranormal as a part of Nature. ^[24]

The same program was at the heart of *The Key*, as the Master of the Key was at pains to point out:

There is no supernatural. There is only the natural world, and you have access to all of it. Souls are part of nature. (14)

In his book, Talbot quotes Blake and his metaphor of the ‘grain of sand’ just as the Master of the Key does in *The Conversation* (32). Talbot also discusses the research of brain scientist Karl Pribram:

In a series of landmark experiments, Penfield used this fact to his advantage. While operating on the brains of epileptics, he would electrically stimulate various areas of their brain cells. To his amazement he found that when he stimulated the temporal lobes (the region of the brain behind the temples) of one of his fully conscious patients, they re-experienced memories of past episodes from their lives in vivid detail. [...] From his research Penfield concluded that everything we have ever experienced is recorded in our brain, from every stranger’s face we have glanced at in a crowd to every spider web we gazed at as a child. (THU 12)

The same medical anecdote reappears in *The Conversation*:

This is why, for example, when certain areas of the brain are probed, the physical buffering mechanism can be paralyzed, causing the memories stored in this way to flood into the chemical cells. The person then has stunningly detailed recall of past events, as if the moments were being lived again. Nothing of your life is forgotten, or of all your lives. (42)

Pribram's argument in *The Holographic Universe* was that Penfield's experiment could not be replicated, causing Pribram to conclude that there was some holographic basis to human memory. Strieber retained the brain-probing anecdote but seems to give it the exact opposite meaning in *The Conversation*.

Some obscure technical language in *The Conversation* also seems to come from Talbot; for example, the notion of 'complex patterns' holding information is presented by Strieber as one of the Master of the Key's revelations about the nature of the soul. The notion of 'subtle energy' also connects the two works.

There is even the rather striking fact that in *The Conversation*, Strieber plays with the idea of naming his source of otherworldly knowledge 'Michael':

That's an even more clever answer—what's your name, anyway?
If I said Michael? (22)

For all the borrowing by Strieber from Talbot, perhaps even more uncanny is the borrowing by Strieber of himself in connection with Talbot. *The Conversation* bears incredible similarities to the text from Strieber's *Breakthrough* chapter *Michael's Gift*.

<i>Michael's Gift in Breakthrough</i> (1995)	<i>The Key</i> (W&C) (2001)
[...] we little band of recently risen animals, barking at our visitors with voice as yet hardly changed from the days when we lived in the forest.	<i>How do we surrender to God?</i> Return to the forest. Otherwise, you will destroy the earth and yourselves. (15)

[...] mercy is everywhere, in the air	Forgiveness is everywhere. It is the soul's very air. (72)
[...] there is a love that is [...] is immediately present, here and now, always	You can find your perfection right now, this moment, always. (21)
[...] had shown me what the love that is spoken of by Christ and Buddha truly is.	<i>What of Jesus? What of Buddha?</i> (24)
The darkness had taught me [...] the true meaning of compassion	The darkness is the compassion of God (49)
I saw the true meaning of compassion: that it is the courage to give what is most needed, no matter how much it hurts	<i>What is compassion?</i> Finding what others need the most and giving it to them. (61)
I saw the true meaning of "love thine enemies," that the enemy makes the victory sweet as certainly as the light depends on the darkness to be seen. If there was no evil, good would be invisible	Remember that the air is never so sweet, nor thy wife so comely, nor thy child so beautiful, as after the battle won. We depend upon our enemy for the sweetness of our lives. Love your enemy, for he is your best friend. Without the darkness, you would never know the glory of the firmament. (55)

Given that Strieber was familiar with the God-as-hologram concept, as is clear from statements in his book *Breakthrough*, it is impossible to conclude other than that the 'Whitley' in *The Conversation* is a fictional character. Furthermore, the intense similarity between pronouncements made in *The Conversation* and the language in *Michael's Gift* suggests that while composing *The Conversation* and drawing on concepts from Talbot, Strieber was also unconsciously reworking material in the same mental vicinity; namely, his chapter *Michael's Gift*.

EVERYTHING HE SAID WAS NOT NEW

WE HAVE SEEN that Strieber borrows heavily from Gurdjieff-Ouspensky in *The Conversation*. For all the tremendous debt he owes to Gurdjieff-Ouspensky for everything from the notion of using the power of attention to maintain the soul after death to the triadic positive-negative-reconciling schema to Gurdjieffian vocabulary to even specific turns of phrase (cf. Tarcher's "I don't know, I wasn't there"), Strieber nevertheless fails to name Gurdjieff even once in *The Conversation*.

We have also seen that the 'Whitley' in *The Conversation* is a fictional character: Strieber in real life was well acquainted with the idea of a holographic universe and the idea of "God as a hologram" (32). This conceit functions again to deny an outside intellectual influence.

Now, in the central demonstration of the present article, it will be shown that in *The Conversation* Strieber borrows heavily from himself. As seen in the previous section, highly idiosyncratic language from *The Key* appears years prior in the chapter *Michael's Gift* in slightly different form. Such resemblances cannot be put down to similarities between ideas or to coincidence: they reflect very particular lines of thought and a personal phraseology belonging to Whitley Strieber.

Accordingly, what follows are statements of the so-called Master of the Key presented alongside Strieber's own from published books, journals, and interviews with special emphasis on those from the mid-nineties just before the so-called 'true encounter'. It amounts to a tour through Strieber's life and thought. The list is not exhaustive. But what will become abundantly clear is that the greater part of the Master of the Key's thinking along with numerous examples of language from *The Conversation* are already present in Strieber well before the 1998 'true encounter'.

1. ECSTASY

Ecstasy has a central place in *The Conversation*. It appears by name some thirty-six times (including three uses of "ecstatic") and is given a specific, even technical meaning. Consistent with a variety of mystical traditions, ecstasy denotes a sort of affective state that accompanies complete union with God, and in *The Conversation* it has a holographic formulation:

A single bit of God, which you are, does not only join the whole

like a crumb in a cake, it can attain so much of ecstasy that it becomes the whole. Your destiny, each of you, is to become all of God. But this process is slowed by contact with the points of attachment—and there are trillions and trillions of them—between the energetic and elemental bodies. So detachment, as Buddha said, is essential to ecstasy. (29)

Ecstasy can be defined, therefore, as being “all of God”. Elsewhere in *The Conversation* the point is reaffirmed that ecstasy is the basic purpose not only of mankind, but of all life in the universe:

The aim of mankind is to enter ecstasy. (26)

God is one. Ultimately, all being seeks to join all ecstasy. It is the destiny of every stone, every star, every intelligent creature and simple creature, to become the word. And the word, then, will be made flesh. (31)

But the “all of God” which one is to become not only encompasses the joys of life. It extends to all experience—including and especially death.

And did you die a Jew in the camps?

I died with each of them and all of them. When you kill a being, you kill all being. I die a million times a day. I am dying now, being murdered, being starved, devoured by bacteria, crushed, burned, shot, cut, slaughtered. But I am also being born, awakening into new life, playing in grass, discovering the hidden truths of nature, enjoying the sunshine, reading, eating, engaging in every sexual delight known, all now, all here, always.

And you are in ecstasy?

(He only gazed at me in answer.) (29–30)

Here the meaning of ecstasy is dramatized as a kind of nameless state in one of the only two times in the dialogue when the Master of the Key does not speak, offering silence instead. Becoming “all of God” includes the experience of life at its most intense including “every sexual delight known”, but it also includes the experience of death, presumably every kind of death ever known. Put broadly, ecstasy in *The Conversation* is a point of absolute convergence between life and death. This is clear

from the Master of the Key's discussion of meditation in the context of ecstasy and the gas chambers:

The proper use of meditation is to enable you to see life as both an outsider and a participant. The outsider notices the glimmer of sunlight upon the spoon, the sensation of the food in the mouth, for he is using life to gain impressions. The participant only eats. So also, the outsider sees the packed bodies around him, he smells the sweat and the urine, he hears the soft clatter of the crystals with absolute objective calm, and inhales the searing torment of the gas without being in any way identified with the injustice or the cruelty or the terror all around him. But the participant screams, it suffers the agony of the elemental body, and knows the greatest terror man has ever known, which was experienced in the dark gas chambers of the Holocaust. (26)

Thus, according to the Master of the Key, it is not only possible to experience ecstasy in the gas chambers, it is incumbent on one to do so. Just as it was incumbent upon Christ when he was being crucified:

That seems irreconcilable, but it isn't, because even when Christ suffered, he was in ecstasy. I am here to get you to recognize yourself as divine—that is to say, as a participant in ecstasy even during elemental life. The new man will live in ecstasy, even though he lives in chains. (29)

Christ's reconciled the "irreconcilable" by being in ecstasy as he died. That is, he saw his death as an ecstatic experience as all life is:

No. All life is potentially ecstatic, no matter what suffering or sin is involved. All life, child. (26)

This absolute convergence between life and death at a point of maximum intensity is a uniquely Strieberian motif, one not properly recognized in his work, buried as it is under other layers. Conroy in his *Report on Communion* comes close to identifying it in his discussion of the role of the predator in Strieber.^[25] In *The Path*, arguably the companion volume to *The Key*, Strieber puts the idea succinctly:

How can a man in a burning building be as the lilies of the field,

or a mother being gassed to death by the Nazis with her babies clutching at her legs, or a little child sitting on a street corner in Honduras slowly dying of thirst? How can you, with your dying child's hand resting like a broken bird in your own, be objective?

But these are the times when it matters, the hard times. When the energy of life is greatest—whether negative or positive—is when God calls us to ecstasy. (Card XXI)

Thus ecstasy enters experience whenever “the energy of life is greatest — whether negative or positive”.

Strieber was developing the motif at least as far back as his short story, *Pain*, written just before *Communion*:

These have to do for the most part with pain and death. For death is so connected to sexuality—witness the spider. Who hasn't wondered what the male spider feels, submitting at the same time to the ecstasy of coitus and the agony of death? ^[26]

In *Pain*, a man is slowly tortured by a sort of otherworldly dominatrix. The story's premise gives Strieber the opportunity to explore his concept of ecstasy, as above when he connects the (positive) energy of coitus with the (negative) agony of death, and also below by linking acceptance and despair together in an ecstatic experience at the moment of death:

The best death would be an ecstatic mixture of loving acceptance and deepest despair.

Strieber was again thinking about ecstasy at the time of his 1988 book *Transformation*:

Throughout our history we have rejected the negative and sought the positive. There is another way, I feel, that involves balancing between the two. It is up to us to forge in the deepest heart of mankind the place of reconciliation. We must learn to walk the razor's edge between fear and ecstasy—in other words, to begin finally to seek the full flowering and potential of our humanity. (*Trans* 242–243)

and explicitly connected it with death here:

Is death really a secret ecstasy? (*Trans* 197)

In Strieber's 1997 *The Open Doors*, he again explored an identity between death and sexuality:

Nobody knows anything about the sexuality of death, which is one of the most awful things about dying slowly. (18)

In the slow death, there is passion, there is release, there is... horrible sexuality. Why do you think that public executions are worked by whores? Why did the dying body spring to rapture as the noose tightened or the gas hissed? Why did they appear to be in rapture, they who had given their lives?

Being cut off from living breath--suffocated, poisoned, mashed--touches the body also with pleasure...yes, and so the cancerous old man becomes revoltingly sensual. (19)

In Strieber's 1997 *The Secret School*, three specific aspects of the concept of ecstasy as it appears in *The Conversation* can be found a year before the so-called true encounter. One, the idea that ecstasy involves leaving temporality behind:

Both the body of the little boy in Texas and the young man in Rome were in the same state of vibrating, electric ecstasy. It was this state that held their minds above the flow of time. (124)

Two, that ecstasy was what one seeks across many lifetimes:

The child who had started out from Elizabeth Road was no longer "me." He was just one of many people whom I was inhabiting across a great turn of centuries. Far from being a little boy, I was an old, old creature on a mission toward ecstasy, who sought—and seeks—across history for some permanent connection to joy. (124)

Three, the idea that missing out on ecstasy was a deprivation and a suffering beyond measure:

It is not only fear and strangeness that enforce our amnesia about such states. They are ecstatic, and to remember ecstasy

that one no longer possesses is painful indeed. (127)

Compare with:

What would this waiting be like?

Energetic bodies hunger to be radiant. They taste of ecstasy and want desperately to find their way to the completion of joy. But energetic bodies need to return to time to reconstruct what of themselves impedes their ecstasy. If they cannot, they must suffer the anguish of regret and the pain of being able to see, but not enter, joy. When you taste of ecstasy, your hunger for more is appalling. It is appalling. It has driven me to wander the world, to construct this shell of flesh, to seek you out and come to you with my message, to serve you, little child, as my master. (30–31)

For both the Master of the Key and for Strieber, ecstasy, for being a union with an infinite God, has no limit. Thus, for example, we find in *The Conversation*:

Entropy is the natural tendency of all things to disintegrate. Evil is the addition of intention to that process. Hate is like cold. It has an end. Love is like heat. It does not. (59)

And we find this at the end of Strieber's 1995 book *Breakthrough*:

We will discover then that ecstasy is an energy like heat, without an upper limit. (ch 22)

2. RETURN TO THE FOREST, SURRENDER

Two of the most distinctive turns of phrase used by the Master of the Key in *The Conversation* are his twin exhortations to “return to the forest” and to “surrender”.

How can we change?

Surrender to God.

What about free will?

Free will is only possible in God. The will of the fallen is slavery.

How do we surrender to God?

Return to the forest. Otherwise, you will destroy the earth and

yourselves.

Six billion people can't return to the forest. The forest can't possibly support us.

I agree. It's impossible. (14-15)

Will we ever be strong enough?

Surrender to God and your enemies will become your friends.
(38)

But what will actually happen to us? Will we return to the forest?

The civilization of the northern peoples will be reduced to shadows and memories in the minds of the living. It will follow its own past because of its flaws. (52)

What is the most important thing that Christ said? Do unto others?

That was first said in the western traditions by Rabbi Hillel. The most important thing that Christ said was 'be as the lilies of the field.' It is the message for the next millennium. You are going to return to the wild bearing the wisdom of history in your memories. Your surrender to earth will be your ascension to heaven. (62)

The two concepts are linked, and the above is not a complete list. A full discussion of the use of these terms cannot be given here, but in brief: "surrender" amounts in personal or individual terms to a more complete renunciation and abandoning of self-will than has ever been achieved by a human being: "[a]lthough the great Sufis have, some of them, somewhat, surrendered to God" (28). The abandoning of self-will that is required is understood to be impossible, yet necessary, and involves the complete overcoming of a hardwired fear of death:

How can we regain our vision?

Fear is blindness. Fear rules this world. It is extremely deep. When a microbe is threatened, it will recoil. That's how deep fear is. In the fields, fear rides. In the struggle of the deer to survive the jaw of the wolf or gunfire of the man, fear rides. A shadow has fallen here, into the very atoms that construct this place.

This is an impossible problem. It's beyond our ability to correct.

If one of you could live one moment without fear, then all the world would be free. The emergence of physical life is at once

its fall and its salvation. How can you be fallen and ascended at the same time? In other words, how may the elemental world gain communion with the energetic one? The hidden meaning of mankind is that you may reconcile the irreconcilable. You are here to save all that lives on earth from the fear of death by surrendering your will to God's. Read the Koran, listen to Mohammed. He brought the message of surrender impeccably. You say that it is impossible. It is. But you are here to square the circle. This is why earth evolved intelligence. The aim of mankind is to clear the vision of the living, so that you can join in full consciousness to the dead, and thus learn that fear of death is fear of nothing. (49-50)

Thus a radical reconciliation with death itself is entailed in "surrender" whereby human consciousness, for reaching outside of time and its limitations, is able to overcome its absolute domination by the prospect of death, which in turn somehow transforms the physical conditions of life on earth. The Master of the Key's concept of surrender is naturally related to ecstasy. One might say that surrender is the prerequisite, the 'willful' decision to abandon one's will and to, on one level, experience death in life, an experience itself which is ecstatic.

If surrender is the Master of the Key's prescription for the individual, returning to the forest seems to be his prescription and prediction for mankind collectively. According to the Master of the Key:

When the word became flesh, it became vulnerable. If physical beings don't struggle, you die. So you cannot surrender. And yet you cannot stop your fall unless you do surrender. If you continue to struggle against nature, you will die. But if you don't struggle, you will die. This is tragedy of the word in physical form, and is the essential human problem. This is the problem you must solve, if you are to avoid going extinct. (51)

And so, a "return to the forest" involves a kind of collective surrender in the struggle against nature. It involves on one level a return to the humble conditions of mankind's origins:

How can we regain it? Is something like the Eucharist part of this science?

Christ gave the Eucharist to mankind. But the Eucharistic feast

was enacted from time immemorial. It began when you still lived in the forest. When the strong died, you ate their flesh to gain their strength. (39)

The Master of the Key's complex description of mankind's return to the forest seems to suggest that one way or another, mankind's numbers will be significantly reduced and man will be thrust back into the forest. If mankind affirms this and "surrenders", he will survive:

I am here to bring you a promise from on high: if you surrender yourselves to God, you and the earth will be saved. Otherwise, you will be extinct before the end of the age. (43)

Clearly, surrender and the return to the forest are layered concepts with a complicated interrelationship. One can easily be forgiven for concluding based on this that the vision they represent originates not with Strieber but with the Master of the Key.

Unfortunately, both "surrender" and the "return to the forest" are two concepts that Strieber was developing for many years. In an interview with Ed Conroy in his *Report on Communion*, Strieber said:

When I'm with the visitors I feel as if I'm in the presence of human beings, but I also feel, interestingly enough, that they're more animallike than we are, they don't to have any enculturation at all, or at least there isn't any enculturation that I can recognize. They are an aspect of humanity that has dispensed with history and returned to the spontaneous reality of the forest. They are conscious animals. The future. (344)

This excerpt is notable for two reasons. For one, it gives a fascinating added dimension to the concept of "return to the forest", setting it within the visitors' lack of "enculturation", an aspect that appears nowhere in *The Conversation*. Second, it shows Strieber working on the concept with its exact name some ten years before the 'true encounter'.

Strieber referred to these two concepts by name in previous books. From *Majestic*:

"These others — who appeared to us as aliens — are empaths, but not because they lack experience. They have returned to the forest; they are not men, they are beyond that." (Foreword)

“Regard the lilies of the field,” He said. Why, we who are naked in the rain? If we surrender to the wind and the rain they will be our saviors; the flowers will be our deliverance. (Foreword)

Here one can see return to the forest discussed in terms of the visitors’ lack of enculturation, but also as the “surrender” to nature. Strieber presents the same concept again in *The Secret School*:

On the far side of the time that is coming, I have glimpsed a new vision of mankind, one that is no longer trying to construct its life out of technology and inventions, but has surrendered to nature and taken its part in the mysterious consciousness that guides the unfolding of the world. (116)

Perhaps another way to say it is that, in order to find joy, we must return to our origins—in effect, to abandon the tools and weapons of the adult and take up a new kind of inner trust. Just when it seems that nature is about to turn against us, we must learn to trust her as never before.

We must listen as a child does to the words in the wind and the whispering of the stream, but understand as an adult does the meaning of the weather and the state of the water. Such is joy, a state of surrender that knows...but is quiet. (220)

It is significant that again surrender to nature is linked to ecstasy or “joy”, making it a remarkable coincidence that the Master of the Key should offer the same point of view later.

Strieber also discussed these ideas elsewhere. Participating in a Compuserve forum in June 1994, Strieber invoked “surrender”, saying for example:

Yes. Constant contact is getting more common. I’ve been doing that for a little over a year. And more of my letters mention it. Specifics have to do with personal surrender.^[27]

and:

It is a matter of becoming as used to this as we are to the rising and setting of the sun, or to breath, or to our own lives. The kind of surrender that is needed is active, participating and deeply

freeing. It is not surrender to THEM, but surrender to ONESELF.
That's the beginning.

3. BE AS LITTLE CHILDREN

The exhortation to “be as little children” is given by the Master of the Key as a necessary step on the path to salvation.

The man in the room next to this sleeps a troubled sleep, but I see the glory of his radiant body, and the couple above, who are engaging in fellatio, I see her patient faith in deliverance, and in him, I see a brave heart on a journey to glory. But I also see the way they see themselves, the shadows of their recriminations and disappointments. Be as little children. (44)

The injunction also happens to be a favorite of Strieber's. It appears, for example, twice in the companion volume to *The Key*, *The Path*:

But that's not practical, because the truth is that the knowledge that makes us what we are will not simply go away. We can pretend to be as little children, but we cannot really do it. (Card XVIII)

Always and from the beginning, the path has been about objectivity—compassionate, loving detachment from even one's most urgent needs and desires. “Be as little children,” reflects the inner meaning of the card of the Sun. (Card XXI)

But Strieber uses it as far back as his 1989 novel *Majestic*:

And so when we called them terrible, that is what they became.
“Be as little children.” What did He mean? (Foreword)

This was one of the things that caused the hostilities. “Be as little children,” Will says. Indeed, innocence does not know secrets and it does not know fear. (ch 1)

And it appears again twice in his 1997 book *The Secret School*:

As I turn away from the long years of denial and fear, I find

myself understanding for the first time the true meaning of Christ's admonition: Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (219)

However, Christ said to "become *as* little children," not "become little children," and the distinction is incredibly important. (220)

The full Bible reference is given by Strieber only once above [Matthew 18:3]. Both the Master of the Key and Strieber use a condensed form ('be as little children') that does not really appear in the Bible. Strieber also used this condensed form in this January 1997 interview with Jeff Rense while promoting *The Secret School*. Discussing the relationship between childhood and the type of experiences in the book, Strieber said:

It happened because we were innocent then. Our eyes were open. Simply because we didn't know to close them. And that's when the information comes in from the visitors, I think. When we're too innocent not to accept it. We don't reject anything as children, that's why they come to us like this then. And why I think — I'm hoping — that by using the book people will be able to reconnect with their own innocence and open their eyes the same way they were opened as children. But differently, in a subtle manner. Also with the wisdom of adulthood. In the gospels when it says 'be as little children' then I think it has something to do with this kind of wise innocence. ^[28]

The special meaning of "wise innocence" that Strieber gives to 'be as little children' here is consistent with the perspective of the Master of the Key in *The Conversation* as well as with Strieber himself in the Conroy interview when he talks of a lack of "enculturation" (*Rep* 344) in connection with returning to the forest and to surrender. Strieber underscores this meaning in the Rense interview by saying:

I got a letter once, let me tell you this, from one of my readers. My readers by the way, the 200,000 letters we've got contain the truth of this experience, I think. This woman said a fascinating thing. She said, 'my impression of the visitors is that they pray with the total devotion of children. But they think with the wisdom of an Einstein'. ^[29]

4. BE AS THE LILIES OF THE FIELD

What is the most important thing that Christ said? Do unto others?

That was first said in the western traditions by Rabbi Hillel. The most important thing that Christ said was 'be as the lilies of the field.' It is the message for the next millennium. You are going to return to the wild bearing the wisdom of history in your memories. Your surrender to earth will be your ascension to heaven. (62)

Here again, the injunction to 'be as the lilies of the field' overlaps in meaning with 'be as little children' and 'return to the forest' and 'surrender'. For Strieber in the 1990 book *Majestic*:

"Regard the lilies of the field," He said. Why, we who are naked in the rain? If we surrender to the wind and the rain they will be our saviors; the flowers will be our deliverance. [...] (Foreword)

Strieber also used it in *The Path* (Card XXI) where it is clearly integrated into his own thinking:

"Regard the lilies of the field" reflects the card of the World. [...]

How can a man in a burning building be as the lilies of the field, or a mother being gassed to death by the Nazis with her babies clutching at her legs, or a little child sitting on a street corner in Honduras slowly dying of thirst? [...]

So, how can we be as the lilies of the field? To be surrendered is the hardest thing in the world, and the greatest triumph of the human spirit. [...]

5. SUPERPOSITION AND PSYCHIC ABILITY

One of the more unusual assertions by the Master of the Key is that psychic ability can be put down to the bizarre quantum-mechanical aspects of the physical world:

What are psychics?

A part of the electromagnetic field that fills the nervous system

rests a few centimeters above the skin, outside of the body. This field is an organ just like the heart or the brain. It is in quantum superposition, the electrons effectively everywhere in the universe and nowhere specific. It may be imprinted by information from anywhere and any time. With it, you may see other worlds, you may see the past and the future, you may see into the lives of those around you. You may haunt God. However, the process of imprinting itself causes the organ to cease to be in superposition and thus to cease to be accessible to further imprinting. In psychics, there is either an inborn or learned ability to balance the attention in such a way that these impressions do not cause this organ to become focused into particulate form. The ability to control this organ can be developed. (20)

Let me go back to the quantum issue, because I see that as something concrete that we can understand. You started by talking of using superposition as a means of communication, then changed to talking about entangled particles. What role does superposition play in higher communication?

The tiny layer of electrons that lies outside of the skin is an organ in itself just like the eyes or the blood. It is a sensory organ, but not one that operates naturally, except in a few, as I have stated before. Even in them, it cannot be used very effectively without higher consciousness. It is the organ of higher consciousness. You must be able to watch and not watch at the same time. When you learn this, it will stay in superposition even as you take the imagery that it is receiving into your brain and process it.

You are speaking of opening the third eye?

The nervous system delivers these impressions to the area of the brain closest to the pineal gland, which is where this organ is centered. (23)

This explanation for how psychic ability is possible is very distinctive — and very bold given that it is so technical. The Master of the Key identifies the mechanism, opening up the potential for scientific falsification.

Unfortunately, Strieber was identifying the same mechanism before the ‘true encounter’. From a 1997 interview:

We're in, as a species, a state of "superposition" all the time. We're both nowhere and everywhere. We are making decisions that turn the unpotentiated reality of the species into specific events all the time. But until we understand ourselves as quantum entities and cease to believe in ourselves as linear entities, we cannot fully realize our potential as human beings. We can't be what human beings are meant to be until we do that.

And we actually are beginning to do that in some fascinating ways. I'll give you some examples. The discovery and growth of remote viewing, that it actually works. The government, of course, lied about it when they realized that all the remote viewers had come into contact with the idea that it was a sin to keep it a secret and started running out into the public essentially to save their souls. [...]

But the reality of it is there exists a very, very low energy field around the human body, especially around the head where the brain in it's functioning generates a harmonic of an extralow frequency radio wave that hangs a few microns above the skull. The part of the mind that is contained in that electromagnetic field is nonlocal in nature. And that means that it is literally anywhere and everywhere. This is why you can reach out so far with remote viewing. You can go into the past. You can go into the future. You can go to other worlds. You can go essentially anywhere in the universe which has ever been or will be.

[...] It's because of the fact that there is a principle of quantum physics that reveals that particles are paired and if a particle is affected by an energy in one part of the universe, it's parallel particle elsewhere in the universe will instantaneously, with absolutely no time lost whatsoever, be affected in the same way. We know that. We've proved that with empirical studies. What we don't understand is the energy that links the two particles because they can literally be one on one side of the universe and one on the other. It's called "quantum entanglement."

What we are using when we remote view and when we engage in psychic activities is the conversion of quantum entanglement with the nonlocal part of the human mind using the force of quantum entanglement as a tool. It's a force the nature of which we don't fully understand. [...] These psychic activities do work. We even know why they work, we just don't know how. ^[30]

In that interview which Strieber gave while promoting his 1997 book *The Secret School*, his own explanation for psychic abilities overlaps so completely with the Master of the Key's that it is impossible to assert that the explanation originates with the latter. There is an "electromagnetic field" or "tiny layer of electrons" or "very low energy field" that is "around the head" and is a "few centimeters above the skin" or "hangs a few microns above the skull". It is an "organ" or "part of the mind" and it is in superposition. Using it, you "may see the past or the future".

Strieber gives a similar, if more cursory description in *The Secret School*. Discussing remote viewing, Strieber wrote:

The process, it seems, rests on the fact that the very tiny electromagnetic field that is generated by the brain is available to outside influences. (223)

The explanation for the extraordinary abilities that the mind sometimes exhibits, that media generally dismiss as "the paranormal," probably lies in quantum physics. Electrons in the brain obey the laws of classical, or Newtonian, physics. However, this is not true of the ones in the micron-deep electrical field that surrounds it. In fact, they are in what is called a state of superposition: they are non-local, or undefined as to their structure and position. This means, essentially, that they can be anywhere and—conceivably—in any time. (224)

Strieber goes on in *The Secret School* to cite a 1994 academic paper by Bem and Honorton which he says asserts that "quantum physics may well explain the situation in just the way I have proposed" (224).

In the 2001 *The Prophecy of the Key*, Strieber again cites the paper:

In fact, there has been considerable scientific research into this electromagnetic field and even into its possible properties as a medium for what we call "psychic" exchange. In their paper "Does Psi Exist?" published in the *Psychological Bulletin* (vol. 115, no. 1, 4–18) in 1994, Daryl Bem and Charles Honorton attempt a theory of psychic activity. They theorize that "Bell's theorem states that any model of reality that is compatible with quantum mechanisms must be nonlocal. It must allow for the possibility that results of observations at two arbitrarily distant locations can be correlated in ways that are incompatible with any physi-

cally permissible causal mechanism.”

Could it be that the Master of the Key has identified a specific mechanism by which information gathered nonlocally can be introduced into the brain and processed there? He mentions that the electromagnetic organ of which he speaks is centered in the pineal, the enigmatic gland that is known to produce melatonin in response to light levels, and which, in lower animals, contains minute amounts of magnetite, which some researchers believe that the human pineal may also contain. Most notably, the pineal has been found to be the source of N,N-dimethyltryptamine, or DMT, an extremely powerful but short-acting psychedelic.

In contrast to the breathless questioning above as to whether the Master of the Key had identified the “mechanism” behind psychic ability, in the *Afterword* to the 2011 Tarcher, Strieber was more reserved, even defensive:

The Master spoke of the existence of an energetic organ in the body, which is generated by the nervous system and extends above the surface of the skin. He says that this organ, being composed of electrons, can be in superposition, and when it is, it is “effectively everywhere in the universe and nowhere specific.”

I knew of this theory before I transcribed his words, so it was one of the things that I puzzled about. A paper I had read authored by famed psi researcher Charles Honorton caused me to think that something like this might exist, and I had discussed the idea in speeches prior to meeting the Master of the Key.

Strieber’s self-serving defense here must be untangled from the Bem and Honorton paper. The latter for being mainly a paper on methodology mentions only two things of relevance to *The Conversation*. One, the statement quoted in *The Prophecy of the Key* to the effect that quantum physics may someday provide a theory that encompasses psi phenomena — a statement made only in passing at the close of the paper. Two, that the authors were relying on:

a working model of psi in which psi-mediated information is conceptualized as a weak signal that is normally masked by internal somatic and external sensory “noise”. (*Bem* 5)

Incidentally, this model is implicit in the Master of the Key's claim that when the electromagnetic field is "imprinted", its superposition collapses. To solve this problem, the Master of the Key has the very Gurdjieffian solution of divided attention by which a kind of space is opened up for the "signal" to come through.

Many practices will work, but the best is to meditate in such away that the mind is concentrated on physical sensation. This relieves the pressure of impressions incoming from the physical world on the electromagnetic body and enables it to expand. (21)

But nowhere in the Bem and Honorton paper is there any suggestion of the particular mechanism responsible for psychic abilities, especially one that involves an electromagnetic field surrounding the body or head. Thus, the issue is for Strieber is not that he had "discussed the idea" of psychic abilities and quantum theory "in a few speeches" prior to the 'true encounter'. It was that he was advancing a specific mechanism involving an electromagnetic field in superposition a year or more before it was presented to him by the Master of the Key, one that may well be his own invention: "quantum physics may well explain the situation in just the way I have proposed" (TSS 224).

It is worth noting that Strieber was connecting biologically-generated electromagnetic fields with both psychic ability and mind control as early as *Communion*:

The brain is an electrical device. As such it has a faint electromagnetic field and even emits very, very weakly in the radio part of the spectrum. Specifically, it contains a portion of an extra-low-frequency (ELF) electromagnetic field wave at frequency between 1 and 30 hertz. The heart and musculature also develop electromagnetic fields in the extra-low-frequency range.

A more acute technology than our own might be able to mediate mental and physical functioning to a great degree by the use of sensitive ELF transmitters and receivers. It is more prosaic, perhaps, than the magic of extrasensory perception. But it has just enough plausibility to suggest that external control of the mind, and even the implantation of perceptions (hearing voices inside the head), is not beyond the realm of possibility. (Three)

While Strieber does not directly link the field generated by the brain

and psychic ability at this early stage, it is significant that he mentions the latter in the same context. In the above passage, Strieber connects his 'field' instead with the issue of mind control, just as he does in *The Conversation*.

6. MIND CONTROL

A passage of interest in the problem of the differences between the Walker & Collier and the Tarcher versions of *The Conversation* centers around mind control. Both agree that mind control is being performed on the human population. One asserts that courtesy of his implant, Whitley Strieber is immune to it (Tarcher).

Both also agree as to the means. In this exchange, the Tarcher differs from the Walker & Collier only in the addition of the first sentence.

Radio frequencies. Extremely sensitive circuits can pick up and decode thought. Microwaves can be used to project thought into the brain. But the fields of which I speak are much more general. They create tendencies. The desire is to preserve the maximum amount of freedom in the maximum number of individuals.

Strieber was already thinking along these lines in *Communion*, as previously seen. But the lineage of the Master of the Key's assertion is even more apparent in *The Secret School*:

If government agents can successfully read minds and remote view, so can anybody.

The process, it seems, rests on the fact that the very tiny electromagnetic field that is generated by the brain is available to outside influences. Previously, it could only be measured by contacts that touched the skull, as in an electroencephalogram. But recent advances in circuit sensitivity have made it possible to detect it from a distance. Some patents suggest it can also be deranged or intruded upon with correctly tuned frequencies. (223)

Thus one goes from a discussion of "circuit sensitivity" in *The Secret School* to "extremely sensitive circuits" in *The Conversation*.

Strieber will proceed from the notion of electromagnetic interaction with consciousness to the concept of a specifically conscious form of energy.

7. CONSCIOUS ENERGY

Now this is the first time I had ever heard the phrase ‘conscious energy’. ^[31]

Strieber claims in his 2003/4 audio commentary on *The Key* that he had never heard the phrase “conscious energy” prior to his ‘true encounter’. But he was using it in his 1988 book *Transformation*:

They have taught me by demonstration that I have a soul separate from my body. My own observations while detached from my body suggest that the soul is some form of conscious energy, possibly electromagnetic in nature. (*Trans* 240)

According to the Master of the Key, everything is conscious to some degree. As it gains in complexity, that energy can gain a sort of independent existence as a lifeform:

Conscious energy is not like unconscious energy, the servant of those who understand its laws. To gain access to the powers of conscious energy, you must evolve a relationship with it. Learn its needs, learn to fulfill them. But also remember, it is part of the electromagnetic spectrum, easily detectable by your science as it exists now. You can learn to signal and be heard, and to record response. The veil between the worlds can fall. The undiscovered country can become your backyard. (15)

But the science of the soul is just another science. There is no supernatural, only physics. But the physics and electronics involved in communicating with living energy is very subtle. Nothing, however, that you are not capable of now. The devices needed to make your beginning are already sold in stores. (40)

It is perhaps no surprise that Strieber was thinking along these lines before his ‘true encounter’. In this 1997 interview, a year before the ‘true encounter’, Strieber was talking about the use of scientific instruments to detect a new kind of energy that is “alive” and “exists in an entirely energetic format”. And after detecting it with instruments, Strieber said, we would be able to interact with it:

I would like to see science use the close encounter experience and the presence of UFOs to extend the borderlines of what we perceive to be the real world. Just as in the past, when we devised a long series of scientific instruments, beginning way back in the classical period when we developed geometry and became able to do things like measure the circumference of the earth and the development of the telescope. To the development of the radio receiver and the understanding of how to transmit messages over the radio. To the development of so many other devices that detect different levels of energy, magnetism, gravity, ultraviolet and higher levels of light. Microwaves. Extra low frequency, high frequency, etc. and so forth. We need to be able to determine whether or not, on some level, there is an additional energy to measure. And learn to measure to that. I think that probably what we're going to find is there is such an energy, and that it's going to be the first of those energies that's alive that we've measured. And that we're going to find that life exists in an entirely energetic format. And that we're going to be able to measure this and understand it and interact with it objectively in the future. That would be my hope. Our religions right now are the best way we have of interacting with this level of reality. But I feel quite sure there are better ones that we can discover. ^[32]

Thus life can exist that is “entirely energetic” according to Strieber, or as the Master of the Key calls it, “living energy” (40). What might that living energy look like?

8. PLASMA

According to the Master of the Key, energetic beings, which are conscious to varying degrees, can appear as plasmas:

[Use devices] that detect magnetic fields and electromagnetic plasmas. You will find living energetic beings in this way. They will not be very richly alive, but they will be there. You may also detect simple energetic beings that have little intelligence. They are all around you. (41)

The Master of the Key also uses the term “plasma” somewhat interchangeably with the term “soul”:

Can the soul be destroyed?

An atomic explosion throws all plasmas into chaos. (59)

But Strieber was already associating consciousness with plasma long before his ‘true encounter’. He was writing about consciousness and plasmas elsewhere, for example, in *Transformation*:

First, there appears to me to be some part of ourselves that can live outside the body. Judging from my own movements and behavior in that state I would suggest that it must be some sort of plasma. It would seem that a being can exist in an energetic form that is in no direct way sustained by the brain/body system. (200)

And he discussed the concept in a highly developed way in his 1989 interview with Ed Conroy:

For example, if consciousness has a plasmic form, and I think it does, then many of these lights people see and the balls of light that come into their rooms at night, and so forth, are literally projections of this plasma. Then it’s probable, also, that this plasma is extremely old, and it may even predate matter, that it could literally be the oldest thing in the universe. [...] I’m suggesting that there may ultimately be consciousness which may be measurable and directly accessible to communication, using the right technology, and this consciousness may be completely indistinguishable from what we now call God. It may be this consciousness is responsible for what is happening to us. ^[33]

The Conroy excerpt is significant because it presents the idea that there are lifeforms composed of conscious energy or plasma that are extremely old, so old they may “predate matter”. The Master of the Key tells us the same thing:

The energetic world is much larger, vastly more ancient and more complex than the elemental one. It teems with beings, many of them immeasurably conscious and invested across the whole sweep of time and beyond time. It is enormous beyond measure, stretching across all time and all space, including not only this universe but many other universes. (67)

Strieber's comment to Conroy above is made in the context of a discussion of alien abductions. Strieber not only refers to plasmas and consciousness, but says such things are "accessible to communication, using the right technology". This obviously reappears in *The Conversation* more than ten years later.

More subtle, though, is the idea expressed in the statement: "It may be this consciousness is responsible for what is happening to us". Bear in mind that Strieber is talking about aliens, balls of light, and a variety of energetic beings, all of which, he says, "may be completely indistinguishable from what we now call God". Not only is this view expressed in *The Conversation* — that all beings are one, and are "all of God". But even the idea that the whole alien abduction phenomenon together with the "secrecy" are a manifestation of the participation by energetic beings in our reality also appears in *The Conversation*:

Could aliens walk among us without our noticing?

By bending light, they can be invisible, and walk here to some extent, and also by using means to prevent you from looking at them by influencing your mind from a distance. But there are also those patterned on the same template as you, and they walk freely here. It is their job to enforce secrecy. This is the source of all the confusion about this. They appear, for example, to be part of your government, but they only use it as camouflage and as a source of power. Earthly institutions do not control the secrecy. It is controlled from a higher level.

Are you on that level?

Yes.

Another world is in control of this one?

Other worlds participate, both elemental and energetic. (36)

Will we learn it?

When it is time, all will come to you. But remember, it is you who will choose the time. You exist on many levels, the living in their levels and the dead in their levels. Man is governed from the radiant level.

But our world is dying and falling into chaos? How can we be governed poorly from such a high level?

Man is a child. Children govern children with the wisdom of children. (35)

One finds this idea expressed very compactly in *Communion*:

In some sense, their emergence into human consciousness seemed to me to represent life — or the universe itself — engaged to some deep act of creation. (Three)

9. DESTRUCTION OF SOULS, HARVESTING SOULS

The physicality of the soul is a basic feature of the “new vision” offered by the Master of the Key. In the broadest sense as conscious energy, it can be interacted with in a variety of ways including, for example, detection using instruments as mentioned.

But *The Conversation* gives a variety of other scenarios in which the soul suffers the vicissitudes of a physical existence, many unpleasant.

Can the soul be destroyed?

An atomic explosion throws all plasmas into chaos. They can also destroy themselves, and technological intervention may destroy them. Souls may last forever, but they may be exploited, even killed. They may be executed.

How can they be exploited?

Material of souls is harvested and used to make intelligent machines. (59)

[...]

Do we all share in the production and reconstruction of souls?

Souls can do more than regret. There can be so much loathing that they commit suicide. They do this by isolating themselves from the greater whole, by seeking toward chaos. (59)

That's horrifying.

Human souls have been harvested for this purpose for thousands of years.

By whom?

By whomsoever wishes to and can. Until mankind establishes his own place in the cosmos, there will always be those who use you like cattle. (66)

Thus according to the Master of the Key, souls can commit suicide, be killed, executed, exploited, and even harvested.

Many would regard this basic physicality of the soul as novel, and conceivably it could argue in favor of the authenticity of *The Conversa-*

tion. That human souls could be harvested, for example, seems a lurid, unusual notion.

Strieber, however, had been developing this perspective years prior to the ‘true encounter’. In *Breakthrough*, for example, the physicality of the soul is plainly stated:

However, the recognition that the soul is actually as much a part of the physical world as the body—a conclusion that is, to me, almost inescapable at this point—will inevitably lead to the discovery of previously undetected extensions of reality. (ch 1)

In *Transformation*, Strieber says souls can be killed:

I thought perhaps we have a *potentially* immortal soul, but one that can be killed even after the body dies. (166)

In fact, all the various fates that can befall a soul in the Master of the Key’s “new vision” seem to have been explored in Strieber’s previous work, especially his fiction. In Strieber’s *Cat Magic*, for example, his main character is in danger of having her soul devoured:

She felt herself disappearing, becoming less than nothing. The wires were its teeth: it was eating her soul. (316)

There are so many such cases in Strieber’s work that it is impossible to list them here completely. Here is a short selection:

Perhaps there is a burst of very fine energy as the soul explodes from the body--an energy which can be used for the most subtle and powerful purposes. Or perhaps the soul is, simply, food for finer bellies. (*Pain*)

“They feed on us all.” Because of what he knew about their feeding, he was frightened even to enjoy the secrecy of his marriage, unable to really go in the lights of home or smell the paprika-warm memories of dinner, unable to genuinely behold the skin of his wife glowing in the light of a lamp, afraid to touch the pressed sweetness of their bedclothes, unwilling to lay himself down. (*Open Doors*)

Had they come because of the fire of the bomb, somehow attracted by its fury, or was it that atomic explosion is so violent that it poisons also the world of the soul? (*Open Doors*)

Of course we had the souls of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (in his worst dreams, even the souls are gone.) (*Open Doors*)

A soul is part of the physical universe, and can be affected by appropriate technologies. It can get sick and be nursed and even medicated. Often the visitors say that they are doctors. They are, but it is the soul they wish to heal.

Souls can die, in the sense that they reject all identity and become simply an empty mote of potential.

Sometimes Will seems to think that the visitors are like farmers, and they are here harvesting souls. (*Majestic* ch 23)

10. CONSCIOUS MACHINES

The distinction made by the Master of the Key between consciousness and intelligence is a complicated one that cannot be fully explored here. In one respect, consciousness differs from mere intelligence inasmuch as conscious energy has a physical component.

One of the more outré consequences derivable from this reality of conscious energy is that it can be harnessed and placed into machines:

There is more than one sort of conscious machine. By duplicating the attachments between the elemental and energetic bodies that occur in nature in a purpose-designed machine, a controllable conscious machine can be devised. A living soul attached to a machine will be conscious, but only able to express itself into the physical or sense the physical according to the limitations of the machine's design. In this way, you gain the advantages that consciousness confers on a machine without the danger of its becoming excessively intelligent. A perfect slave can be created, a robot that carries out its programmed instructions with empathy, purpose and precision. And the soul can be kept in it indefinitely.

That's horrifying.

Human souls have been harvested for this purpose for thousands of years. [...]

How do they get our souls?

Soul traps. The lures are the lusts and hungers of this life. The dead man, exploring the newfound freedom of the energetic world, finds himself able to visit his friends and enemies, to see their innermost being and thoughts, even to converse with them in ways that their elemental selves cannot perceive. He is in danger, but he does not know it, for he has not ascended. He is still ensnared by his lust. Soon, he will be shown something that perfectly fulfills his most hidden and cherished desires, desires he has never fulfilled. Unable to resist the chance to do it at last, he enters by a golden door into eternal captivity. (66–67)

The concept of a “conscious machine” is a remarkable one when seen in the full light of the distinction made in *The Conversation* between consciousness and intelligence. The Master of the Key is not talking about simple artificial intelligence when he speaks of a “conscious machine” as is shown by the discussion of “soul traps”.

Unfortunately, even the bizarre concept of a conscious machine appears in Strieber’s lexicon prior to the ‘true encounter’:

I wonder if there could be a conscious machine? (*Trans* 37)

Its effect on me was contradictory—a machine, but a conscious one. (*TSS* 213)

11. DESIGNING INTELLIGENT MACHINES TO SAVE OURSELVES

According to the Master of the Key, for mankind to survive the coming climate catastrophe, it must build “intelligent machines” able to do better “predictive modeling” than the intelligence of human beings can presently do on its own:

What is intelligence?

Intelligence is the ability to correlate data taken to the infinite. To save yourselves, you must learn to build machines that are more intelligent than you are. You will do this, and when you do you will discover the difference between intelligence and consciousness. (63)

We’ll lose control of such a machine.

Most certainly. But you cannot survive without it. An intelligent machine will be an essential tool when rapid climate fluctua-

tion sets in. Your survival will depend on predictive modeling more accurate than your intelligence, given the damage it has sustained, can achieve. (64)

In *Breakthrough* (1995), Strieber was already calling for this:

In our struggle to save ourselves, we will discover the way in which consciousness actually directs the structure of the material world, and become able to design artificial intellects greater than our own, which will propel us higher still. (ch 22)

12. INTELLIGENT LIFE IS EXTREMELY RARE

The Master of the Key affirms — somewhat contrary to expectations in this period of exoplanets being discovered on a daily basis — that intelligent life is rare because the planetary conditions needed to evolve it are rare:

You said thousands of worlds. I would have thought millions—billions.
Intelligent life is extremely rare because planets which can sustain complex bodies are extremely rare. [...] (46)

This happens also to be a long-held view of Strieber's, discussed for example with Conroy for his 1989 *Report on Communion*:

I'm losing my ability to believe that there are many, many other planets, and that they are all somehow in contact with us and all somehow hanging back. I have a feeling that there may be only a few in the universe, and perhaps only one or two others where we are known. I think that conscious species must be extremely rare. (342–343)

Note in both cases identical language is used: “extremely rare”. Strieber has elsewhere talked of the improbability, in his view, of evolving complex life, saying it evolved on earth only thanks to the unlikely presence of our unusually large moon. In *The Secret School*, Strieber describes what he claims was a vision he had during childhood of the earth's formation:

That is precisely what I saw in my childhood vision, thirty

years before this conclusion was reached by science. But there's more to it than that. I was seeing the moment when life on Earth became possible. Without the slowing effect's of the moon's gravity, the planet's thousand-mile-an-hour rotational speed would cause constant surface winds of at least three hundred miles an hour. The gentle winds that characterize our weather would instead be a ceaseless hurricane. [...]

With no ability to sample other solar systems in detail, we cannot know how common it is for planets like ours to have large moons. But the need for something to retard rotation-driven winds must severely limit the number of planets on which higher life-forms can evolve. [...]

The statistical likelihood that an exactly balancing moon would form may be low, but the likelihood that a planet would happen to fall into the narrow livable region around its star may be even lower. However, when it becomes necessary for these two incredibly unlikely events to be combined in order to create an incubator for higher life-forms, then the probabilities virtually vanish. [...] [T]he odds against conscious life evolving anywhere at all become more than negligible. (103-104)

And later speaking of the 'visitors' in the context of life in the universe:

Could it be that they themselves are extremely rare—as rare as we are? (TSS 107)

The Master of the Key is concerned with planets sustaining “complex bodies” and Strieber with those evolving “higher life-forms”. But the Master of the Key does not mention the moon and never explores the issue in any depth. What one sees with the Master of the Key's pronouncement that “[i]ntelligent life is extremely rare” is a case of a surmise of Strieber's, a line of reasoning, being summarized and delivered authoritatively by the Master of the Key. Strieber was making the same case at around the time of *The Key*, writing in his book *The Path*:

Without the moon's gravitational pull to slow them down, winds generated by earth's rotation would blow at an average speed of around three hundred miles an hour, and there would be no life on earth. (Card XVIII)

13. THE STORY OF THE PIG

In *The Conversation*, the Master of the Key recounts the following remarkable story:

In the Hindu tradition there is this story: The God of the Universe became curious about how it felt to be a pig. So he entered the body of one. He found it delightful beyond compare — how good the sty smelled, how sweet were the slops, how desirable were the female pigs. But the universe needed tending. There was work to be done. So the helpers and handmaidens went and said, ‘God, you must come out of there. The universe needs you.’ God said, ‘Who are you talking to? I am just a pig! Leave me alone!’ So they killed the pig, and God came out, and refused to believe he had ever refused to leave. (57)

It is a story that one could well think originates with the Master of the Key. But in a 2013 *Journal* entry Strieber mentioned in passing two intellectual influences, Meister Eckhart and Patanjali, in what appears to have been the first time Strieber ever mentioned Patanjali by name.^[34] Examining Patanjali’s work one finds that the Master of the Key’s Hindu story comes from there:

“There is a story,” writes Swami Vivekananda, “that the king of the gods, Indra, once became a pig, wallowing in mire; he had a she-pig, and a lot of baby pigs, and was very happy. Then some gods saw his plight, and came to him, and told him, ‘You are king of the gods, you have all the gods under your command. Why are you here?’ But Indra said, ‘Never mind; I am all right here; I do not care for heaven, while I have this sow and these little pigs.’ The poor gods were at their wits’ end. After a time, they decided to slay all the pigs, one after another. When all were dead, Indra began to weep and mourn. Then the gods ripped his pig-body open and he came out of it, and began to laugh when he realized what a hideous dream he had had; he, the king of the gods, to have become a pig, and to think that pig-life was the life? Not only so, but to have wanted the whole universe to come into the pig-life! ^[35]

Of course, this only shows that Strieber knew of Patanjali in 2013. It

is possible that Strieber only became acquainted with Patanjali after the ‘true encounter’, perhaps even as a result of the Master of the Key’s story. The question becomes whether Strieber showed any evidence of being familiar with the story of the pig before 1998.

In 1997 Strieber’s novella *The Open Doors* appeared in a collection called *Revelations*. In that story, Strieber gives his main character, John von Neumann, a dream based on the story of the pig:

That night he dreamed an odd dream. In it, children had been throwing him slops. He had not understood why a gentleman and a doctor would be billeted in a barn, until he saw his own tracks and realized that he was a pig, a fat pig, and saw that he had died and become this filthy beast to whom table leavings and even own shit smelt sweet. He became aware that the dancing children were fattening him and that he could not resist the crusts of bacon and the boiled carrots that they tossed to him, even though he saw the cool interest in their eyes.

His pig body was so richly alive that he felt like a demigod on tiny hooves. When he cried out, there was song in it--high song--and an ancient, mysterious sense of incantation. He was powerful in his pigdom, the glorious, the king, the recipient of fine foods. He loved their long arms and their pudgy hands, but not their dark, deep eyes--no--the eyes opened into the unknown--but they served him in their shorts and boots, the girls in their starched aprons.

Where their hands grasped him, he felt a dread electricity, as if they were made of shivering fire. He sang his song, he raised his eyes, but his servants had become his masters, and suddenly there was white heat in his throat and the pouring blood, and then their own cries of pleasure, and he heard the melody and was dead.

When he awoke from this death, he was in a white room, and there were men around his bed.

In both the Master of the Key’s telling and in Strieber’s dream for von Neumann, a greater being enters the body of the pig, is overcome by its sensuality, and loves the “slops”. In von Neumann’s dream, his slaughter is an ecstatic mixture of slaughter and joy, the pig’s voice even while its throat is cut constituting a “song” and “melody”, and its butchers giving “cries of pleasure”, all consistent with Strieber’s work.

14. WICCA

What about the ancient faiths? Wicca, for example?

Modern Wicca is not an ancient faith. It is a new faith that recognizes an ancient practice. The earth is worthy of worship, for it gave you all that you are and have. It offers an impeccable path. (40)

The exchange above, a small but strange digression in *The Conversation*, might be surprising. Wicca, after all, has very little mainstream cultural presence, and it is debatable what Wicca even is, though the Master of the Key helpfully defines it here in terms of earth worship.

At once surprising and unsurprising is the fact that Strieber has long had a sympathy for Wicca, to the point of appearing on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* ^[36] while still in his ‘secular intellectual’ phase (an “indifferent skeptic” as Strieber called himself in *Communion*) in order to defend it against Christian fundamentalists.

Strieber defending Wicca on Oprah, June 24, 1987:

Mr. STRIEBER: [...] I finally found a witch named Margot Adler, who’s a very famous witch, and she showed me around to a lot of other witches. And what I discovered was simply this. you take all of the nonsense and the lies and the superstition and the fear, mainly the fear that is in our hearts, away, and what you have is just another human religion.

That’s all. And so it turned out to be a religion with really neat traditions, and it made a wonderful book. I had more fun writing *Cat Magic* than I ever have had writing one of my books.

and later:

Mr. STRIEBER: I learned so much about real reverence from these people, from the witches, more than I ever learned before. Although I come from a very loving Catholic home, I never knew what reverence for our earth could be until I came into the presence of witches who loved it with their blood. I never knew —

WINFREY: What do you mean with their blood?

Mr. STRIEBER: I mean so deeply, so deeply. No —

WINFREY: I don’t think that’s such a good example you’re using.

Mr. STRIEBER: I think it is. I disagree with you, Oprah, I think

it is a good example. Because what I was trying to say is that they love it more deeply than I imagined it could be loved.

Strieber evidently shared the Master of the Key's sympathetic view of wicca long before the 'true encounter'. It is also clear from Strieber's comment on wicca in his book *Transformation*:

Wicca is also known as Witchcraft, but it has no relationship to Satanism and other such perversions. It is recognized by the United States government as a legitimate religion, and many of its ministers, such as Ms. Fox, can perform marriages and carry out all the other legally recognized functions of the clergy. Dora and Anne and I were interested in Wicca because, when all the superstitious nonsense that surrounds it is cleared away, it emerges as an ancient Western expression of shamanism, which is the oldest of all human religious traditions. In this it is very similar to Native American and African religions. Like the other ancient nature religions, it has an important lesson to teach us about love for the earth. (227)

Strieber even identified himself as a one-time witch in an interview appearing in Winter's 1985 book *Faces of Fear*: "I have been a witch. I have experimented with worshipping the earth as a goddess mother" (202).

15. THE ZODIAC, HAMLET'S MILL

The Zodiac figures prominently in *The Conversation* where its origins are explained in this way:

What's going to happen to us?

You have come to the end of the resources that were given you in the time that was given you. We measured the rate at which you would expand and grow very precisely, and fitted your development to a calendar which we devised called the Zodiac. In your writings, Whitley, you have wondered why mankind would have such a long-count calendar. Why were simple farmers in need of it? They were not. We needed it. The constellations of the Zodiac are arbitrary inventions to enable us to mark the progress of the equinox and keep track of exactly where you are in your journey. At this moment, the little fish of Pisces is about to be spilled out

onto the dry land by Aquarius. All you know how to do, little fish, is swim. How will you swim upon the dry land? Let me give you a hint: that water of Aquarius is the energetic body. (56)

In the 2011 Tarcher's *Fragmentary Inclusions*, the Master of the Key gives the following advice for how the human race might survive:

You can save yourselves by a number of means. [...]

Understand your past and what you have lost so that you are no longer surprised and destroyed by the cycle that has your planet in its grip. Your interest in the past, instilled in you from boyhood, should enable you to crack the code of *Hamlet's Mill* and impart the message that it contains. Why are you so slow? Time is running out.

Of course, it is notable that it is up to Whitley Strieber to “crack the code of *Hamlet's Mill*” which he is uniquely able to do because of his interest in the past, “instilled” in him since “boyhood”. But interestingly, in the text of *The Conversation* there is nowhere any indication that there is any mystery to the Zodiac left to be solved. It is presented quite clearly as an “arbitrary” long-count calendar of human development created, we are left to infer, by those who ‘govern’ mankind at higher levels. It comes off as an interesting example of Strieber in dialogue with himself: in one part of the dialogue Strieber explains to himself another part. The ‘code’ of *Hamlet's Mill* is cracked perhaps when Strieber decides that the Zodiac is a calendar measuring mankind's development and puts this discovery in the mouth of the Master of the Key.^[37]

Accordingly, the Master of the Key is right when he says Strieber “wondered” about the Zodiac in previous writings. In *The Secret School*, Strieber discusses both the Zodiac and *Hamlet's Mill*:

If so, then perhaps the ancient myth of Hamlet's Mill has some truth to it. [...] The mythical mill has been brilliantly identified by Giorgio De Santillana and Hertha Von Dechend in their book *Hamlet's Mill* as the precession of the equinox. [...]

Could it be that the deep past created the zodiac to warn its own distant future of the danger that would arise when a certain object passed close to the Earth? [...] Certainly the houses of the zodiac were not named because the constellations actually look like the figures they are supposed to represent. [...]

Presently, we are moving from Pisces to Aquarius, which science tells us has no special significance, but it would be reassuring if we could find some way to determine why the zodiac was created. (154-156)

Just as in one of his early accounts of meeting the Master of the Key, when the Master of the Key showed he was interested in a book Strieber was reading called *Forbidden Archaeology*, it appears that in the *Fragmentary Inclusions*, yet again the Master of the Key is interested in what Strieber was reading, this time *Hamlet's Mill*. And it appears that the Master of the Key's explanations regarding the zodiac seem designed to answer Strieber's questions both as to the reason for the names (by offering two examples of their symbolism establishing a sort of general rule) and the zodiac's overall purpose (arbitrary calendar measuring evolutionary development).

Nevertheless, there is reason to doubt that this information originated in a 'true encounter'. In *The Coming Global Superstorm*, a book which Strieber says was based on the Toronto conversation, Strieber was hard at work cracking the code of *Hamlet's Mill*, with the symbolism of the most recent ages of the Zodiac explained in terms of human evolutionary development:

In other words, the action that characterizes the beginning of Aquarius has started: the pond of belief and assurance in which Pisces swam so comfortably is being drained, its living water being poured out by Aquarius. We who have always relied on earth's ecosystem to sustain us must now find a way to sustain ourselves.

The same symbolism of Pisces as fish-in-water and Aquarius as the impossible evolutionary problem of the fish being dropped on dry land are as they would appear in *The Key*. But *The Coming Global Superstorm* appears to have been finished in the first half of 1999 with a hardcover publication date of December 1, 1999. It is significant that while Strieber did not start writing *The Key* in a serious way until late 2000, the metaphors attached with the ages of Pisces and Aquarius appear already fully developed in *Superstorm* more than a year earlier. Of course, Strieber might say that this was simply because *Superstorm* post-dated the 'true encounter', but viewed alongside all the other problems, there is reason for doubt.

16. OFFICIAL SECRECY, EVIL, AND THE REPUBLIC

In *The Conversation*, the Master of the Key expresses his concern for the American “republic” and the “evil” of “official secrecy”:

Government is not what it seems?

Form an assault on secrecy. You are right to fight against official secrecy. It is the greatest present evil. (16)

I have written of it—evolutionary pressure. It explains what’s being done to us—the theatrical appearance of UFOs in the sky, the assaults on us by night, the ferocious official secrecy, the collapse of the environment—all of it. (34)

The United States will die? How?

Already it has ceased to be a republic and become an empire. The United States is ruled by secrecy. The power of the electorate is fictional. Votes are worthless. Until the secrecy ends, the United States is in its death throes. (73)

This cluster of signifiers, “official secrecy / evil / republic”, is very much Strieber’s own and appears elsewhere in his work. In his 1989 novel *Majestic*, Strieber writes:

An old Socialist and gentleman named Norman Thomas once said, “Where the secrets start, the republic stops.” (ch 3)

Strieber may be drawing on autobiographical material since elsewhere he says that the real Norman Thomas told him this when he was a child. ^[38]

In a December 1994 e-mail posted to a forum, Strieber associates “official secrecy” and “evil”:

Budd Hopkins has said in lectures that I probably know more about what is going on inside the government than anybody, implying that I am somehow a part of the “inside” I, who loathe the whole concept of insiders and consider official secrecy a crime against the Constitution. [...]

I consider the secret government a costly, unconstitutional and downright evil enterprise that we ought to get rid of. Period. It

has no business existing in a free nation like ours. No more CIA, DIA, NSA, NRO, or military intelligence beyond the battlefield. And throw open every single existing file to public scrutiny, without exception. Maybe it was OKAY during the cold war, but that's over. ^[39]

And in his 1997 *The Secret School*, Strieber makes this prophecy for the 'near future' in connection with the republic and official secrecy:

The power of the military/industrial complex will end, and with it official secrecy. What will take the place of the old system will be freedom in the form of a republic that is real. (232)

17. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT 'TESTED'

In *The Conversation*, the Master of the Key suggests that the American government was "challenged" by the aliens and given a "test":

I don't feel that we have access to the whole of the physical world, then. We're trapped here on earth, for example. Our space program has lead feet.

When you were challenged from the outside, your government chose the path of public denial and secret defiance. This is the path to failure. It must change its policy to one of public admission and open defiance.

You speak of secrecy concerning the alien presence here?

Until you take your place, you will remain trapped. The threats that have been delivered to your government in secret are a test. To pass it, you must defy them. Your place will not be given you. You must be strong enough to take it. (15-16)

The same interpretation using the word "test" appears in the fictional foreword to Strieber's 1989 *Majestic* based on the Roswell incident:

In 1947 somebody from outside this world attempted to form a relationship with mankind. First contact fell to the United States government. Fresh from victory and full of pride, our generation failed the test. We made a horrible mess of it. We did not understand the subtle and terrifying — the magnificent — thing that they were. (Foreword)

18. OPEN DEFIANCE

The Master of the Key suggests that despite threats from the so-called visitors that cannot be ignored, the American government must nevertheless “defy” them:

You speak of secrecy concerning the alien presence here?

Until you take your place, you will remain trapped. The threats that have been delivered to your government in secret are a test. To pass it, you must defy them. Your place will not be given you. You must be strong enough to take it. (15-16)

In the *Afterword to Majestic*, the same prescription is given using the same language:

Despite all policy and no matter with whom it originated, our government must now take a calculated risk — perhaps even defy the others themselves — and officially admit that they are real.

19. RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL

One striking moral attitude displayed by the Master of the Key in *The Conversation* is that one can be “personally and entirely” responsible for a state of affairs generally regarded as too remote or too great in scope for a single person to be “personally and completely responsible”.

The first world is a slave owner. You are all slave owners. You have enslaved the people of God, your own brothers and sisters who are poor. Do you understand the cruelty of the world as it is now, with five billion people enslaved to a billion? Each of you owns five slaves. But you never see your slaves, so you need not be concerned about their health and welfare. You let them fend for themselves, locked away in their poverty and suffering. I will tell you this: when one of my children dies in the slave barrens that cover this planet, I also die, and you, my arrogant friend, even you die a little. [...]

Yes, you are winning the battle against slavery in some places. But losing it in others. Remember this: every one of you is entirely and completely responsible for the welfare of all others. So if a child is starving in Liberia, Whitley, you are personally and

entirely responsible for him. (70–71)

The notion of complete personal responsibility for everything is entirely consistent with the core premise of *The Conversation* that everything is holographically interconnected: if a direct connection can be drawn between everyone and everything, then one can be seen in principle as being responsible for every other thing. The suggestion that all are responsible for all naturally also functions in a literary sense to give the Master of the Key the great moral authority that Strieber wants the figure to possess.

Nevertheless, we find the same unusual notion of direct and complete personal responsibility for things that go beyond well the usual social calculus in a little-known interview Strieber gave prior to *Communion*. A friend of Strieber's who appeared in *Communion*, Annie Gottlieb, had a book published in 1987 called *Do You Believe in Magic?* on the 'sixties generation'. Strieber was featured in the book and in a discussion of the Cold War and the atomic bomb was quoted as saying:

"I consider myself personally responsible for every atomic bomb that's there," says Strieber. "And I think every one of us should. Every time a person starves to death in the Third World or is killed because of some vicious, unjust government, supported by us or the Soviets, each of us is personally responsible. And we are responsible for the non-human as well. Otherwise you can't really live. Otherwise you're not a whole human being." (395)

Not only is direct and total responsibility present in Strieber's outlook here, the example immediately following in both *The Conversation* and in the Gottlieb interview is the same: someone starving in a Third World country. And another Key-like motif even appears: the need for the darkness or the non-human in order for the "whole" or completely human to exist, as seen in: "Without the darkness, you would never know the glory of the firmament" (55).

20. GOD SEEKS COMPANIONS

One of the more unusual ideas in *The Conversation* is that human beings are not meant to be lowly supplicants before God, but "companions" of God. It is quite clearly an important idea as the Master of the Key is at pains to convey it:

Because you have no plan for yourselves, there is no plan for you. God wants companions, not supplicants. Become the friends of God, and you will find your plan. [...]

It did. Very precisely. If you were a friend of God, you would have understood. (14)

You will, in short, acquire a true aim, and join the companions of God in their journey toward ecstatic and conscious union with one another and all that is. (18)

On the contrary, it is total surrender. The unfocused fragments of lives barely lived do not contribute to the ecstasy of God. God seeks true companions. Ecstasy is not ecstasy unless it is shared. (24)

When this happens, the body begins to radiate of its own accord. It becomes at once God and co-creative with God, a companion. (29)

Some of them will die in eternity and be part of you no more. Others will go on to become companions of God. (48)

The notion that human beings could or should rival God has appeared throughout human history, but the idea that God wants “companions” and is waiting for human beings to join him is perhaps less common.

Strieber, in any case, was familiar with the idea because he was discussing it, for example, in an interview a year before the ‘true encounter’:

I’ve never been aware of any particular spiritual bias, if you will, in the Visitors. They’ve been much more utilitarian in their contacts with me. But I have gained a lot of spiritual insight on my own part from my relationship with them. [...] And the objectivity that I saw there greatly enhanced my own spirituality in that my relationship with God went beyond the mere love and “demand level” that we usually live at where we love God and make demands through prayer and into much more of a sense of “companionship.” And I began to understand what it meant when it is said in the Bible that Man was made in the image of God. It is literally quite true that Man is made in the image of God, and you can feel this if you cease to be a beggar and a pleader and become

a companion to God. ^[40]

In Conroy's 1989 *Report on Communion*, Strieber discusses the idea that we are to be "companions of God" at length:

If you knew everything and were eternal, you would be absolutely desperate. You would have to be extremely creative if you expected to remain sane. You would be in a state of extraordinary terror, because you would be so alone and so unable to change anything. You would be desperate for a companion. I think that's probably what the motive is behind the physical universe. I think that the plasmic being—God—is attempting to create a companion. That's what we will one day become. The companion of God. (345)

If we return too soon to God, we will be an unworthy companion. To be God's companion, our will must first grow as strong as His. (348)

We are at last, some of us, learning how to become conscious companions of God, which is what this species is all about. [...] We seek to become such a companion of God that he's not something incredible, not a bearded man in the sky, or a great awesomeness before which we prostrate ourselves, but a friend, as ordinary as you or me — a dear friend. (348)

In Douglas E. Winter's 1985 *Faces of Fear* collection of interviews with horror writers, Strieber gives an account of where he got the idea:

Certainly I believe in some kind of unifying force in the universe. I once had a conversation with a great Zen master named D. T. Suzuki. He told me that the universe is God's effort to create a companion—that this companion of God is in the process of birth, and will eventually emerge out of the physical universe. And he said that God is the receptacle of time in which all things happen. (20)

21. NOT ALL HAVE SOULS

Strieber has often imputed to the 'visitors' the view that while not

all human beings have souls, all may have them under certain conditions, as in this comment made on the website for his book *Solving the Communion Enigma*:

It's quite easy to communicate with them. When I had close encounters, I would often simply ask questions aloud. Usually, the answers would be in the form of vivid pictures in my mind. Sometimes, words I heard as if projected into my head. On rare occasions, spoken words. Two spoken responses were: To the question, what would help me the most, the spoken answer was "Have joy." To the question, do human beings have souls, the spoken answer was "Not all." ^[41]

Of course, as mentioned in the section on Gurdjieff, this basic conceptuality comes from Gurdjieff and the Gurdjieff work. In Ouspensky's *Miraculous*, for example, Gurdjieff discusses it in terms of the astral body:

You know what the expression 'astral body' means. But the systems with which you are acquainted and which use this expression state that all men have an 'astral body.' This is quite wrong. What may be called the 'astral body' is obtained by means of fusion, that is, by means of terribly hard inner work and struggle. Man is not born with it. And only very few men acquire an 'astral body.' If it is formed it may continue to live after the death of the physical body, and it may be born again in another physical body. This is 'reincarnation.' If it is not re-born, then, in the course of time, it also dies; it is not immortal but it can live long after the death of the physical body. (ch 2)

In *The Conversation*, the same curious notion — that not all human beings have souls, but they may acquire them — is presented in terms of the radiant body:

I am trying to find out our relationship to it.

Not all human beings are radiant bodies. But all may become such. (16)

22. SOULS TIED TO SENSUAL DESIRES

One of the more striking ideas in *The Conversation* is that there is a world of the dead where they are in a sense still living 'lives'. According to the Master of the Key:

You will find your dead in the immediate surroundings of their lives, for the most part, clinging to what they can of their memories, attempting to preserve their selves despite the magnetic attraction of what would envelop them. (18)

Most dead appear as innocent children, longing for sensual lives and hoping that a body will be sparked that fits them. Some are aware enough of radiant being to try to ascend, but they always drift back, or if they become lost, are returned to earth. (23-24)

The dead are said to haunt the vicinity of their "sensual" lives. It is a striking notion, but one already discussed by Strieber. According to Strieber in *Transformation*, a psychiatrist named George Ritchie died of pneumonia for exactly nine minutes before returning to life. Ritchie wrote about his experiences in a book called *Return from Tomorrow*. In Strieber's recounting of Ritchie's experience we again have the word "sensual":

Does this mean that souls are all around us, able to see and hear everything? Dr. Ritchie reported that he saw souls tied to their sensual desires, wandering everywhere in the world. (*Trans* 200)

In fact, this assumption that the dead have 'lives' of their own was being made by Strieber at least as far back as *Communion*:

Another thought was that the visitors might really be our own dead. Maybe we were a larval form, and the adults of our species were as incomprehensible to us, as totally unimaginable, as the butterfly must be to the caterpillar. Perhaps the dead had been having their own technological revolution, and were learning to break through the limits of their bourne. (Three)

23. SOULS IN CONFUSION

In *The Conversation*, the experience of dying is characterized as one of “confusion” as in this discussion of the Holocaust:

But if there had been no gas chambers, would there then have been none of this grandeur?

They made of their suffering, with great effort, what one who attains the heart of a child may easily make of the drift of a cloud or the peaceful ringing of a bell upon a summer evening. And only a few. Most died in agony and confusion, all for nothing. It is easier to reach ecstasy through joy than through suffering. (43)

In *Transformation*, Strieber was already discussing the experience of dying in terms of “confusion”:

In a reality made of energy, thoughts may literally be things. I suspect that in such reality a person who dies without a way is lost, unable to surmount the confusion that his own soul is creating around him. (*Trans* 97)

24. UNBEARABLE TRUTH AFTER DEATH

Following what for many is a passage into a post-life situation marked by confusion, according to the Master of the Key, the dead are forced to confront themselves and the unmitigated truth of their lives:

What do these souls do while waiting?

They experience peace, some of them, only coming slowly into an awareness of what they need to continue on. Others are frantic, because of the nature of their lives. There can be great anguish, as loved ones are witnessed in the nakedness and, often, the horror of their own lives. There can be obsession, and the lusts of life can be endlessly indulged but never satisfied, for the physical world can be seen but not touched by these beings. However, there is also kindness among them. In a world where there are no secrets, only truth, the compassion of one for another is very great. (20)

There are no “secrets” in the afterlife, and those still living are

“witnessed in the nakedness” of their lives by the dead. Thus the ‘lives’ of the dead are very difficult: they are forced to confront the brutal truth about themselves and they are perpetual voyeurs of the living including their own loved ones.

These exact aspects of the experience of the dead were being explored by Strieber as early as *Transformation*:

The fire of hell may be kindled by seeing oneself as one really is. And heaven’s balm emerges if there is reconciliation. (202)

If this is all true, it means that we are not alone within ourselves, and that all our secrets are available for this other world to see. That we know this instinctively might be why we deny it consciously. For most of us it would be very hard to bear. (200)

25. TAPESTRY OF MEMORY, EVERYTHING IS RETAINED

As discussed in the section on Gurdjieff–Ouspensky, the basic reason why according to the Master of the Key the dead must confront the truth about their lives is that every detail of the past is fully present in the afterlife, that is, outside of time. According to Ouspensky, the past is not a present that has ceased to exist, but instead fully exists though outside of view. Strieber adopts this notion, and thus for the Master of the Key, “every detail” of every life ever lived is retained.

Isn’t this going to heaven?

There is a some ecstasy, but it is not complete. When another elemental body forms that fits the pattern of that particular fragment, it will return to the physical in search of more sensation. Or, if one never does, its unfulfilled desires will remain forever as a part of the tapestry of memory. (17)

You describe our historical effort to know God as a work of art. What do you mean?

You are weaving a tapestry of living memories. This is what the body of man is—a great weave of shimmering, living cloth. It is full of all the hopes, failures, fears and attainments of the ages. Every detail is there, every step taken by every foot upon every path, not just the acts of Buddha or Christ or the great leaders. Nothing has been forgotten, not the single drawing of a single

breath. All lives are all completely present in this work of art. (43)

This Ouspenskian understanding of time viewed in terms of the afterlife was already being explored by Strieber in *Transformation*:

I suspect that every instant of life literally freezes in memory, ready to play its part later in a rigorous self-examination that follows death. (201)

In *Breakthrough*, Strieber uses the same metaphor of the tapestry multiple times, also calling it a “work of art”:

As the shock of the moment wore off, such an unimaginable vastness of detail flooded me that I could not keep up with it. I felt then that every single instant, every single perception, no matter how tiny, still existed in the extraordinary weave of souls that surrounds the earth. The least movement took me flowing down the streets of a life, the cries, the sweat, the struggle. The tiny journey I had made into past time now seemed almost superfluous.

It wasn't penultimate moments, mostly. For the most part it was an immense, incredibly alive tapestry of small living details—the gleam of light upon a child's hair, a pencil falling, a man burning leaves, children leaping back and forth across a stick, the cry of a boy who had found a comb, the spiking sting of a bullet's penetration. [...]

I cannot put into words how this looked, except to say that there was a sort of rueful, poignant dimming here and there in the living tapestry, as if the souls not there will be missing—and missed—forever. Even so, the light of man shone bright, but the places of the souls lost to the tapestry of heaven are like the skeletons of leaves. [...]

You find that your soul is being etched deeply by every tiniest act, that you are a kind of work of art, your own essential creation: the way your soul looks is how you have lived. It is this that we live for, to add the beauty of our years to the tapestry, and go back and work again if it is not done, to transform the little chip of stone that is oneself into something that can fly. (ch 14)

The metaphor of the tapestry visible from outside of time was also

being used by Strieber in his novella *The Open Doors*:

City of God, Garden of God: not a physical place, really, but one outside the nature of time. The earth, he saw now, was not a globe at all: the energy of time was what rounded it and set it on its perfect traverse of the sky. In reality the world was an immense tapestry, its leading edge being woven by the busy worms of life. Yes, a tapestry in the palace of God's mind [...]

26. MANKIND OUTSIDE OF TIME

While the metaphor of a tapestry provides a visual image for the collective experience of Mankind as seen from “outside of time”, the Master of the Key has the Ouspensian understanding of events appearing as geometrical objects:

From outside of time, man's effort to know God appears as a single form [...] (42)

In the discussion of the ‘fall of man’, the Master of the Key invokes it again:

There seems to be something very extraordinary hidden in what you're saying. You're saying that the fall of mankind was the emergence of life on earth. Am I right?

You are, but that is a three-dimensional view, and thus limited by the limits of three-dimensional vision. Remember the analogy of how the two-dimensional being sees a solid object. As a ball passes through the flat plane on which such a being would be confined, it would not see the real shape, or even be able to conceive of it. By definition, a two-dimensional being cannot look up, for then it would see into the third dimension, which is impossible for it to do. What it would see, always looking straight ahead, would be a dot that would grow into a line, then slowly contract again into a dot and disappear. It would never understand the true nature of the ball, because its two-dimensional mind cannot contain the concept of a solid object. (50)

The Master of the Key goes on to say:

The emergence of life on earth and the fall of man are the same, in two ways. First, outside of time, all events are one, so they happen simultaneously. Not that they have happened, but that they are always happening. (50)

The notion that mankind can be viewed from “outside of time” as a “single form” was already being explored by Strieber in *The Secret School*. First, there is the Ouspenskian view that time is an “aspect of shape”:

As we accelerated out of the temple and the sky above it, and beyond time, I began to see the world in a very different way. Time began to be added to everything as a new aspect of shape, with the result that things became long, reaching up out of the core of the Earth in enormously complex lines that emerged from a deep glow at the center of the planet. (TSS 128)

Second, like the Master of the Key, Strieber was imagining the history of mankind as a “single form”:

An interesting thing that I have discovered is that there are apparently images of us that exist outside of time—time forms, if you will—whose shapes contain revelations about us that are beyond our normal intellectual vision. The largest of these that I have seen appears to span the entirety of consciousness, including both the distant past and the far future. I cannot point to a specific experience during which the vision emerged into my mind. As I worked on remembering the secret school, it slowly came into focus. (TSS 227–8)

Strieber goes on to describe this form “outside the time stream” visually:

It is a view of the progress of man seen entirely from outside the time stream. It appears in my mind’s eye as an enormous object hanging in a blue space. The space itself is conscious, ecstatically so. It is as if the blue space is the mind of God and the glowing object the idea of man.

It consists of a shining dark globe at one end and a bright, sun-like one at the other. Between them is a huge, spiraling stream that starts out dead, dark black and glows brighter and brighter

until it explodes into the sun-like globe.

As I understand this vision, the dark globe is the past civilization that I have glimpsed, the spiraling fountain is mankind moving through the chaos we call history, and the bright globe is what we will shortly become. (TSS 228)

27. BALL PASSING THROUGH A PLANE

As shown earlier in *The Missing Gurdjieff*, an important thought-experiment presented in *The Conversation* likely came to Strieber from Ouspensky, though it is traceable back to Hinton.^[42] Ouspensky's concern with dimensionality, and the argument by analogy about the limits on what human beings are able to perceive appears in modified form in *The Conversation*:

[...] Am I right?

You are, but that is a three-dimensional view, and thus limited by the limits of three-dimensional vision. Remember the analogy of how the two-dimensional being sees a solid object. As a ball passes through the flat plane on which such a being would be confined, it would not see the real shape, or even be able to conceive of it. By definition, a two-dimensional being cannot look up, for then it would see into the third dimension, which is impossible for it to do. What it would see, always looking straight ahead, would be a dot that would grow into a line, then slowly contract again into a dot and disappear. It would never understand the true nature of the ball, because its two-dimensional mind cannot contain the concept of a solid object. (50)

In a 1994 exchange on a Compuserve forum, some four years or so before his 'true encounter', Strieber uses the same thought-experiment to account for the difficulty in describing the 'visitors':^[43]

However, I do know why this is. It is because they possess a dimension of mind that enables them to address physical reality as a plastic, and enables them to see it from outside of time. Their message is actually quite clear: we can reach this also. The reason that I cannot articulate what they are is the same one that would prevent a two dimensional creature — the proverbial flatlander — from describing a solid object except in terms of the

lines it presented as it moved through his plane.

Strieber uses the analogy again in 1997's *The Communion Letters*:

Indeed, the whole folklore of alien encounter as it presently exists seems more like a two-dimensional creature's description of a ball passing through his flat world: he sees only an undulating line. The description is correct, but does not even begin to accurately explain the reality of the ball. Indeed, it can't, because a two-dimensional creature cannot conceive of a three-dimensional object. (TCL 10)

28. CHANGE ONLY POSSIBLE WITHIN THE TIME STREAM

One of the basic differences between the living and the dead, according to the Master of the Key, is that change is possible for the living on account of their being within the "time stream", while the dead remain more or less outside of time:

Nobody can change except inside the stream of time. Outside of it nothing changes. Nothing can. We enter the time stream by inserting our energetic bodies into elemental bodies on this planet of which we were born. (33)

Because of the use of such technology, elemental bodies extended their perception outside of the time stream, with the result that the school of the earth ceased to work as a place of change. Who knows the truth, cannot find their weakness, and that is your aim on earth. (53)

And we lost access to the science of God—your science?

The part of your brain that enables you to utilize electrons without drawing them into the particulate state was turned off. You became time-bound. You went to sleep, sinking into the time stream, which is where you remain trapped. (56)

One does not have to look far to find the same concept in Strieber's earlier work. In *The Secret School*, for example, Strieber wrote:

What this lesson involved was a completely new way of being

aware of something that I suspect is commonplace to all of us, but intentionally ignored. We stay away from it because it is dangerous to the sense of spontaneity that living inside time offers, which we use to create change in ourselves. (TSS 133)

Here we find not only “living inside time” linked to “spontaneity” and “change”, but the assertion that things which threaten this ability are found to be “dangerous” on some deep level and are avoided. Compare to the Master of the Key saying:

Do energetic beings appear in the physical world?

An example would be the much maligned crop circles. These are two dimensional portraits of these beings, self-created. They are trying to introduce themselves.

[...]

Why doesn't anybody believe in them?

They are a manifestation of the rising of the dead and thus the end of the time during which souls can change. For those souls who are yet incomplete, this is terrifying, because they fear two things: first, that this means that it's too late for them; second, that they will, if they conjoin the world of the dead, also see as the dead see, and thus become unable to change even if the earth remains able to support elemental bodies. So they pretend that it's all false. There are many other reasons to conceal such things, but these are the strongest. (41)

Strieber talks about denial again in *The Secret School*, this time in connection with prophecy, and makes the same argument the Master of the Key makes as to why the reality of crop circles is denied:

Over history, we have often tried to use the tool of prophecy [...] In recent years, this wonderful tool has been debased into sensationalistic trash. We have done this for the same reason that we deny the existence of any and all gateways into the more potent levels of reality: to protect the precious ignorance that gives life the zest and surprise, the wonder and horror, that are capable of changing our souls. (TSS 191-2)

Strieber talks at great length about the “time stream”, spontaneity conferring the possibility of change, and so on at around the time of *The*

Secret School. In a 1997 interview with Sean Casteel, for example, one finds the following:^[44]

The other two journeys represent a movement into the earth's future and a movement into my own past in Rome. These both involved an extension of consciousness outside of the time stream, and then a return to the time stream at different points. [...] And this movement and leaving of the time stream is a very ancient, magical, shamanic process where the soul comes to draw into consciousness its memories of all the times it has spent in life and its vision of its own future.

[...]

What we have to learn to do — and this as much an inner movement as an artifact of some potential technology — is to learn to move out of the time stream so that we can examine it more carefully and come to understand its real meaning.

29. GOING INTO THE LIGHT

Bell: A very good friend of mine lives in Las Vegas. His name is John Lear. And I've interviewed and known John over the years. He once told me something on a talk show, ahm, that he said you had told him. That I have never forgotten and never been able to get over. He said, 'When you die, don't go to the light. It's a trick. Go to the dark.' And—

Strieber: I said that?

Bell: He said that you had said that to him. And possibly you've forgotten it or possibly it was never said, but I want—

Strieber: Well, who knows? I mean I've said a lot of things in this lifetime. I wouldn't say I haven't said that. But at the same time, I don't know quite what the context of it would have been. I don't remember the conversation. I had some conversations with John though so it's possible, I guess.^[45]

Whatever Strieber's trouble recalling in 1995 whether the idea belonged to him, it certainly belonged to the Master of the Key in 2001. Consistent with the idea that God wants 'companions' and the notion that in a Gurdjieffian way one should seek to maintain oneself after death to that end, the Master of the Key says:

So the light is not our friend?

The light is the fate of sleeping man. Awakened man makes his own light, as part of the radiant choir who sing forever the song of God, which is the word. (18)

Compare this with what Strieber had to say in his audio commentaries on *The Key*:

I always had the feeling that there was something about going into the light that was a kind of defeat.^[46]

And at that point I thought immediately of going into the light. And this is what we're all now believe we're supposed to do after death. And I've always wondered about that. And I've wondered whether or not that was really what we were looking for.^[47]

30. DRINKING THE WHITE LIQUID

Wilfred Stone, the main character of Strieber's 1989 novel *Majestic*, bears more than a few similarities with Strieber himself. In Chapter 25, part of Stone's ongoing first-person narrative in the novel, Stone relates:

I screamed and screamed and screamed and they cooed and finally a voice spoke. It was like a machine talking. "What can we do to help you stop screaming?"

In *Communion* Strieber wrote that the 'visitors' asked him the same question:

One of them, I think it was the one I had identified earlier as the woman, said, "What can we do to help you stop screaming?" This voice was remarkable. It was definitely aural, that is to say, I heard it rather than sensed it. It had a subtly electronic tone to it, the accents flat and startlingly Midwestern. (One)

Likewise in Chapter 15 of *Majestic* we find:

"Why do you call on your gods? We're the only ones here." The voice was swift and breathless and tough and far from human.

In a *Journal* dated August 25, 2000, Strieber wrote:

It is why the visitors once said to me in a time of great distress, “why do you call on your gods? It’s only us.” At the time, it seemed a cruel, even devastating thing to say, a demonic lie. But I see it now for what it really was: an invitation for us to take our place in God--to surrender ourselves to consciousness.^[48]

The similarities between Stone and Strieber were enough that they caused a reviewer for *Kirkus Reviews* to complain:

Overlaid on [the main] story, though, is another--a hazy rehash of the psychospiritual events recounted in Strieber’s *Communion* and *Transformation*, with Stone in the Strieber role: of how Stone had been monitored by ‘the visitors’ since childhood; of how, after Roswell, they tested his soul--for ‘[a man] sees in those dark angelic eyes a reflection of what he truly is’--and found it wanting.^[49]

The blurring of the lines between fictional Stone and less fictional Strieber also occurs in an important way with respect to *The Key*. As early as his first *Journal* after the ‘true encounter’, July 19, 1998, Strieber was writing about being forced to drink a white liquid:

Just before he left, the man in Toronto had me drink a fluid. He reminded me that I had taken this same drink as a child. He said that it contained the structures of my life, up until that night. He was here to give me the second cup, which would contain everything from June 6 until my death. He told me when and how I am to die, but he also said, “if you value your sanity, you will never utter this.” I can certainly see that. But I sense the truth of what he said, and I think that I have gained the peace of a dying man.

The detail was retained in more or less the same form in the later published versions of *The Key*. But Strieber’s character Wilfred Stone was also forced to drink a white liquid in the 1989 novel:

She was holding out what looked like a plain, ordinary glass of milk. “You’re thirsty, you need a drink.”

She was absolutely right. I took it and swallowed two huge gulps

before I realized that it was incredibly bitter, so bitter my head was splitting. I spat milky spray but she grabbed the glass, before I threw it down. [...]

I choked and struggled but she was like a creature of steel, not a living body. "You will forget," she said, "until the latter days of your life." [...]

The milk of forgetfulness made the room turn slowly round and round. The last thing I saw clearly as I collapsed was that dress. In the flickering light it became a field of yellow primroses. (ch 28)

In the *Afterword* to the Tarcher, Strieber also referred to the white liquid as the milk of nepenthe:

Then I also remembered that, as he left, he'd asked me to drink a white liquid that he'd had in one of the glasses from the bathroom. But hadn't I refused? Surely I had.

Then I thought of the Milk of Nepenthe, the drug that was mythically given to people who had visited the gods, in order that they would not suffer the anguish of remembering the pleasures of heaven when they had to return to mortal life.

I had not wanted to drink it, but I hadn't refused. So this must have been a dream. In real life, I would never have drunk something like that.

It is significant that Strieber is being asked to drink something one of his fictional characters already had to drink — a white liquid affecting memory. But one can see in Strieber's *Journal* and later in *The Key* the highly self-serving aspect that characterizes so much of the 'true encounter'. While the white liquid in *Majestic* is clearly the mythic milk of nepenthe designed to make one forget, somehow in Strieber's case the white liquid in the 'true encounter' is meant to do the opposite, to make him remember:^[50] it restores to him the 'structures' of his life according to his *Journal*, and certainly with the transcription of *The Conversation* we are presented with what can only be regarded as a superhuman feat of recollection. The same contradictory self-serving turn is seen with Strieber's implant, which according to the Tarcher uniquely protects Strieber from mind control, despite the wide suspicion by members of the UFO culture that implants may be mind control devices.

31. 'ALREADY' SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT FOR OTHER REALITIES

For some time prior to the 'true encounter' Strieber was interested in using scientific equipment to communicate with "conscious energy", and even urged the scientific community to develop equipment and techniques for that purpose as in this 1997 interview:

Just as in the past, when we devised a long series of scientific instruments, beginning way back in the classical period when we developed geometry and became able to do things like measure the circumference of the earth and the development of the telescope. To the development of the radio receiver and the understanding of how to transmit messages over the radio. To the development of so many other devices that detect different levels of energy, magnetism, gravity, ultraviolet and higher levels of light. Microwaves. Extra low frequency, high frequency, etc. and so forth. We need to be able to determine whether or not, on some level, there is an additional energy to measure. And learn to measure to that. I think that probably what we're going to find is there is such an energy, and that it's going to be the first of those energies that's alive that we've measured. And that we're going to find that life exists in an entirely energetic format. And that we're going to be able to measure this and understand it and interact with it objectively in the future. That would be my hope.^[51]

But in one passage in *The Conversation*, the Master of the Key suggests that the equipment needed for such otherworldly contact was already available:

But the science of the soul is just another science. There is no supernatural, only physics. But the physics and electronics involved in communicating with living energy is very subtle. Nothing, however, that you are not capable of now. The devices needed to make your beginning are already sold in stores. (40)

This might be taken to conflict with Strieber's view, except that by 1998 his view had evolved. In this interview given with Sean Casteel in 1998 while promoting *Confirmation* (suggesting it took place before the 'true encounter'), Strieber had the following to say:

Well, what I want to add is that the scientific community can address this in a rational way. There are already instruments and techniques that would allow us to deal with this scientifically at every level and answer some of the questions that now surround it.^[52]

32. STILL USING 'JETS'

The Master of the Key's concern with our level of technology leads him to make a rather unusual remark about "jets" early in the dialogue:

Why has the Holocaust prevented us from leaving the planet?

The Holocaust reduced the intelligence of the human species by killing too many of its most intellectually competent members. It is why you are still using jets seventy-five years after their invention. [...] (13)

The reference to "jets" seems somewhat colloquial and out of place. One might expect instead mention of "jet engines" or "propulsion" more generally. But here is Strieber making the same observation about "jets" in a 1998 interview just months before the 'true encounter':

[~37:05] If you look at the hidden history of the development of propulsion devices, and you stop and think that we're still flying around in jets, maybe we are dangerous and maybe we're being held back.^[53]

33. NO SUPERNATURAL ONLY NATURAL WORLD

One of the Master of the Key's primary positions is that there is no supernatural in the traditional sense, only phenomena not yet understood by science:

The veil between the worlds can fall. The undiscovered country can become your backyard.

But how can we do this?

By first realizing that you are not cut off. There is no supernatural. There is only the natural world, and you have access to all of it. Souls are part of nature. (15)

Of course, this radical statement — that “[t]here is only the natural world” — is perfectly consistent with the expansive naturalistic view that has been present in Strieber’s writing from his earliest fiction. Strieber’s first novels, after all, featured creatures traditionally understood as supernatural, such as vampires and werewolves, existing in natural relation to human beings as predators to prey.

In *The Conversation*, Strieber is more concerned with providing scientific explanations of the soul, the afterlife, psychic ability and so on, and so the notion of predation is confined to elliptical comments about souls being harvested. But the expanded natural world of souls, ghosts, and so on that the Master of the Key describes was also evident in Strieber’s work. In *Breakthrough* (1995) Strieber was already calling for the collapse of the distinction between the natural and the supernatural just like the Master of the Key above:

The world is not divided into the physical and the supernatural at all; it is simply that the physical is much larger, more various, and richer in content than we have dared to dream. (ch 1)

In an interview given to Sean Casteel at the time of *The Secret School*, Strieber took the same view:^[54]

It’s just that these tools don’t seem physical now only because we don’t understand the energies. There is a continuum from the very simplest expression of energy to the very highest and the most extraordinary and most numinous expression of energy. And there is no nonphysical world at all. The spiritual world, as we call it, is also part of the physical world. It’s simply a part that we don’t yet understand. So, that’s how the two fit together. I don’t recognize a difference between physical sightings and metaphysical encounters because there is no difference. One we understand, one we don’t. That’s the only thing that’s different.

And in another interview with Casteel, this time promoting *The Communion Letters* in 1997, a year before the ‘true encounter’:^[55]

I think that there exists the possibility to scientifically discover whether or not things like the soul exist. In other words, to bring the so-called supernatural and paranormal phenomena into the realm of reality. I don’t really believe in the paranormal or the

supernatural. I think there is only a physical world, some parts of which we can understand and perceive, other parts of which we cannot understand and perceive.

34. BARRIER BETWEEN LIVING AND DEAD WILL FALL

There is an evolutionary dimension to mankind's growing awareness of the true scope of the natural world. According to the Master of the Key:

Wait for what?

To understand that, you must first understand that the living and the dead share the same world. Your dead are not off somewhere in space. Their lives and beings are intertwined with yours. They see all that passes here, but can only affect it indirectly, if they can make themselves heard in the minds of the living. However, you the living are changing now. As this change proceeds, you are better and better able to feel the presence of your dead. You will find your dead in the immediate surroundings of their lives, for the most part, clinging to what they can of their memories, attempting to preserve their selves despite the magnetic attraction of what would envelop them. (18)

Indeed, it is one of the features of 'the age' that the lives of the living and the dead will come to inhabit the same space. Or as the Master of the Key says:

The veil between the worlds can fall. The undiscovered country can become your backyard. (15)

Of course, Strieber was advocating for this notion before the 'true encounter' using very similar language. In *Breakthrough*, Strieber wrote that the "veil between the worlds is growing thin" (ch 14). In *The Secret School*, Strieber prophesied that "the barrier between the living and the dead will collapse" (233).

35. CONSUMER SOCIETY

In *The Conversation*, the Master of the Key reveals that a particular destructive mechanism will be used to reduce mankind to almost noth-

ing and to return it to the forest: the “consumer society”.

What you refer to as ‘the consumer society’ is actually a mechanism designed to ensure your proper transition from Pisces to Aquarius. Each transition has such a mechanism. The last one, transferring you from Aires to Pisces, was the idea of the risen man. This idea, and the ethics of the gospel, gave you a structure upon which could be built a new society. But that time is past. The society has outlived its usefulness. It’s time for something new. This is why the present mechanism is destructive, not constructive.

The Consumer Society is destroying the planet. And that’s intentional?

After the suffering you are about to endure, mankind will never again lust after material wealth. You are about to suffocate in your own garbage. (57)

It is perhaps no coincidence that the “consumer society” was a special cause of concern for Strieber a year before his ‘true encounter’. In January 1997, Strieber did a two-part interview with Jeff Rense in which the “consumer society” came up in each part, the term used by Strieber alone both times. First:

[~28:00] The consumer society has corrupted childhood to a great degree. Childhood has been under assault. Really since the late ’fifties. We first discovered the idea of the teenager at about 1952 or ’53. And then we began to exploit the teenager in the mid ’fifties, early-sixties. And that methodology brought in a lot of money. And it’s been extended down into childhood. So that now, and this is why younger and younger kids act like teenagers, and teenagers remain childlike for a much longer time. Because they’re in a sense — they’re trapped. They’re in a cocoon. Where it feels like they are living a life. But what they are actually doing is being exploited.

And later in the second part:

[~26:40] I think it was an interesting Christmas in that it sort of, I think, maybe there was a kind of sea change. Because you know there was much less bought this Christmas than there is most

Christmases. And I think that people are beginning to feel a little bit as if the consumer society simply isn't enough, and that that is running a lot deeper in the culture than we realize.

36. FACTS VERSUS TRUTH

An unusual distinction appear in *The Conversation* between facts and truth, two things normally associated but set in opposition to one another by Strieber. The distinction is important enough that it appears in *The Conversation* twice:

There are no facts, only truths. (39)

You look for facts in a place where there is only truth. (42)

Interestingly, the same distinction appears in Strieber's early novel *The Hunger*, in which "machines" (again, Gurdjieffian vocabulary) for dealing only in facts therefore deal in untruth:

Machines only gather facts and must therefore lie. (ch 10)

37. LOVING YOUR ENEMY AND THE BATTLE WON

As noted previously, the Master of the Key has a very broad-minded view of the value of "the darkness" and one's enemies:

Remember that the air is never so sweet, nor thy wife so comely, nor thy child so beautiful, as after the battle won. We depend upon our enemy for the sweetness of our lives. Love your enemy, for he is your best friend. Without the darkness, you would never know the glory of the firmament. (55)

Similar language appears in *The Secret School*:

Without the terror, though, none of the rewards would come. There would be none of the sweetness, not to say the glory, of victory. [...]

So also does Christ's admonition to love one's enemy. There is an extraordinary benefit: the air after a battle won is sweet indeed. (TSS 83)

And as previously noted, we have the same language in Strieber's earlier work *Breakthrough*:

I saw the true meaning of "love thine enemies," that the enemy makes the victory sweet as certainly as the light depends on the darkness to be seen. If there was no evil, good would be invisible [...] (ch 12)

This notion of loving your enemies because they offer the experience of victory was swirling in Strieber's mind even at the time of his early novel *The Hunger*:

Love your enemy, her father used to say, for without him you would never taste the flavor of victory. (ch 4)

38. 'DESTRUCTION' OF THE JEWS

The Master of the Key gives the following explanation in *The Conversation* of the Holocaust:

This is because of the Holocaust. The destruction of six million may well lead to the destruction of six billion. [...]

The Holocaust was triggered when economic disorder combined among the Germans with a feeling of being trapped due to overpopulation. The resultant explosion drove the German tribe to lash out against other tribes, especially the one that lived in its midst. Unfortunately, they murdered the bearers of the intellectually strongest genes possessed by your species. (13)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Strieber also gave an explanation for the Holocaust in his 1986 story *Pain*. In both cases, the word "destruction" is used to describe the extermination of the Jews:

The Nazi destruction of the Jews was a particularly vicious exception to this rule: Hitler killed the Jews to consolidate his power. They owned too much of the German economy, and nothing he did would ever make them trust him. They formed a certain reservoir of opposition and so had to be destroyed.

While the two explanations as to why the Holocaust occurred have

different concerns, they show Strieber was used to setting himself the task of forming a concise historical explanation for the “destruction” of the Jews.

39. INSIDE THE GAS CHAMBER

The Master of the Key gives a description of an actual experience inside the gas chambers of the Holocaust:

The outsider notices the glimmer of sunlight upon the spoon, the sensation of the food in the mouth, for he is using life to gain impressions. The participant only eats. So also, the outsider sees the packed bodies around him, he smells the sweat and the urine, he hears the soft clatter of the crystals with absolute objective calm, and inhales the searing torment of the gas without being in any way identified with the injustice or the cruelty or the terror all around him. But the participant screams, it suffers the agony of the elemental body, and knows the greatest terror man has ever known, which was experienced in the dark gas chambers of the Holocaust. (29)

It is a sudden, moving description because of the suggestion in the text that the Master of the Key was there experiencing the “soft clatter of the crystals”:

Are you dead?

Yes.

And did you die a Jew in the camps?

I died with each of them and all of them. [...] (29)

But in his 1997 novella, *The Open Doors*, Strieber wrote a similar description that likewise referred to the sound of the “crystals” — this time their “tinkling fall”:

We work for God, we who are too elegant of mind to bear God— we work for a girl of twelve with corn gold hair and lips like Sharon’s roses, who in the middle years of your life, darling Adolf, stood naked, her cornish hair crawling with three stages of the lives of the louse, and listened in the dark to the tinkling fall of the crystals and then to the high wide loud shrieks of eight hun-

dred other children with corn gold hair and lips of Sharon, and tasted of the gas, and thought in her terror and last humiliating confusion that the silver 'Gott Mitt Uns' beltbuckle of the gentle man who had ushered her in was a talisman of deliverance.

40. THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

In *The Conversation*, the 'Whitley' character is concerned about the brutality of alien abductions, and that it may be their primary meaning:

Are there such things as alien abductions?

As you grow in fourth mind, you see more.

Many of these encounters are brutal.

The kitten is terrified of the veterinarian. To subdue the little creature, violence is unavoidable.

But the slaughterhouse is also brutal.

Yours is not the destiny of the steer. (22)

Much later in the text, however, the Master of the Key again speaks of human beings and whether they are like "cattle":

That's horrifying.

Human souls have been harvested for this purpose for thousands of years.

By whom?

By whomsoever wishes to and can. Until mankind establishes his own place in the cosmos, there will always be those who use you like cattle. (66)

In the first passage, Strieber gets the reassuring answer that "[y]ours is not the destiny of the steer". Thus the brutality of abductions is not an end unto itself, and "slaughterhouse" not a codeword for the basic meaning of human life in relation to these other, more powerful beings. In the later passage, the Master of the Key nevertheless concedes that in some cases human beings are treated like "cattle".

The question is obviously of great interest to Strieber — and was so long before his 'true encounter'. Strieber's 1986 story, *Pain*, reflects a previous stage of development in Strieber's thinking. A story that begins with a bizarre digression into UFO-related questions, *Pain* contemplates whether suffering is not the whole purpose to human life on account of

higher beings who feed off of that suffering and use humans in the way a human farmer uses livestock:

Because it knows that this hidden civilization feeds on us, the government does everything possible to hide reality. It does not want us to know that our lives, our culture, our very history has been designed for the purpose of causing us suffering, and that there is nothing whatsoever that any of us can do to relieve ourselves of this burden.

[...]

The obvious conclusion is that they use us for their own reasons, gaining something we do not understand from our suffering and our slaughter, gaining strength perhaps, or pleasure, or maybe even the fundamental energy of their civilization. As the burning of oil fuels human civilization, moving planes and cars, providing electricity and heat, so also the carnage of human beings might provide this invisible higher civilization with its prime energy source.

In *Pain*, for the purposes of telling a more lurid horror story, but also because it reflects his genuine thinking, Strieber resigns himself to the fact that the earth is a slaughterhouse and that man is like a steer:

This is a slaughterhouse, but we the victims are not gainsayed the blessing of a quick club to the head or the slitting of the throat. The greater our learning, the happier the angels.

The concern about mankind as 'steer' and the 'slaughterhouse' surfaced again in *Communion*:

If they were real visitors, though, I wanted to know the ethics behind their assertion of their "right." Of course, we ourselves barely question our rights over the other species on earth. How odd it was to find oneself suddenly under the very power that one so easily assumes over the animals. [...]

I remembered when my father took me to a slaughterhouse in Fort Worth. and I heard the rumble of panic and saw the bucking backs of the steers and the creamy whites of their eyes.

I smelled the slick of manure and urine and blood, and heard the steady crunching of the blows and the blare of the saws. [...]

Try as I might, I simply did not have the feeling that the visitors were applying the same cold ethic to their relationship with us as we did to ours with the animals. There was something of that in it though, very definitely. I had been captured like a wild animal on December 26, rendered helpless and dragged out of my den into the night.

Nor did I feel that they were simply studying me. Not at all. They had changed me, done something to me. I could sense it clearly that night but I could not articulate it. (Three)

41. THE WEIGHTLIFTER

Why do they harm us so terribly?

The objective of resistance is to make you strong. The weightlifter puts more and more weight to himself, so that he'll be able to lift more and more. (37)

The metaphor of the weightlifter is used by Strieber in an interview with Sean Casteel in May 1998 or before:

Well, I know you haven't. But the thing that makes this so difficult to understand is how could they seem to be hostile to us when they're actually trying to help us? That's one of the things that hard to understand. But it becomes very obvious if you realize that what they're trying to do is make us strong. How do you make somebody strong? You make them exercise. You make them flex their muscles. You create, for example, questions that they can't bear and that they can't answer. That makes them strong. But just handing them starship plans, like they do in the movie "Contact," that makes us weak. That hurts us. That's hostile. ^[56]

42. QUESTIONS NEITHER BORNE NOR ANSWERED

The notion that contact with the visitors produces questions that can neither be borne nor answered has been advocated by Strieber repeatedly over the years. In the pre-May 1998 Casteel interview, Strieber says for example:

How do you make somebody strong? You make them exercise. You make them flex their muscles. You create, for example, ques-

tions that they can't bear and that they can't answer.^[57]

In a May 1998 'live chat' while promoting his book *Confirmation*, Strieber wrote:

We are facing questions that we cannot bear to leave unanswered, but also that we do not have enough information to answer properly. No matter the motives of those who have given us these questions, the questions themselves are richly evolutionary.^[58]

The Master of the Key, of course, agrees with Strieber's thinking:

What form does this help take?

It is a process of creating questions that can neither be borne nor answered. You know this. (34)

43. 'MAKE NO MISTAKE'

The Master of the Key uses expressions of emphasis that Strieber himself uses. In the following Tarcher ΔK, the phrase "[m]ake no mistake" appears, though it is edited out in the Walker & Collier:

We learn from our mistakes. But those who give themselves to evil suffer. Make no mistake. They can become so heavy that they sink into the earth. Just as the energetic body can enjoy extraordinary pleasure, it can suffer excruciating pain. You have in your body a few million nerves. But in your energetic body, every tiny bit of being can experience the totality of ecstasy or agony.

Strieber also uses the same expression in *The Path*:

[T]here have been places and times when even possessing the Tarot was a crime punishable by public burning. Make no mistake: dangerous times can always come again. (Card I)

And in a 1998 interview:

It's so powerful. The engine of repression is so overwhelming powerful and getting stronger by the day. It's much stronger than

it was ten years ago, make no mistake. People aren't as derisive now, but this engine of repression is really well organized in the media now. It's much better than it was before. ^[59]

And in a 2014 Dreamland interview:

And make no mistake, folks. It is Saudi money and Saudi weapons behind the Isis movement. They are there. ^[60]

44. EARTH NO LONGER ABLE TO 'SUPPORT' YOU

In a June 1994 Compuserve forum, Strieber had this to say:

Absolutely. What is inevitable is that at some time soon the planet will become irreversibly unable to support us and there will be all kinds of environmental breakdowns. ^[61]

In his 1995 book *Breakthrough*, Strieber uses the same term:

The crisis of our species will come when our growing population interrupts biospheric renewal in ways that seriously diminish the planet's ability to support us. (ch 22)

The idea that the world will soon become unable to “support us” is put into the mouth of the Master of the Key, who verifies it again using the same verb:

This is of absolutely fundamental importance, because the earth will soon be unable to support you, and yet you will not be able to leave. (13)

Look to the details of the transition between signs, and you will be able to find precisely where the earth will cease to support you. (58)

45. OVERPOPULATION

Strieber's concerns about overpopulation were visibly on display in *Nature's End*, his 1986 novel about worldwide environmental collapse in 2025 due to massive human overpopulation. The hardcover subtitle to

the novel was “The Consequences of the Twentieth Century”. In Winter’s 1985 *Faces of Fear* interview, Strieber laid most of our current problems at the feet of overpopulation:

Strieber has just returned from an overseas tour promoting *Warday*, and he talks about the global reach of his fear:

“I am afraid...and concerned. I am very sad. Especially because of our inability, as a species, to address the great problems that we face. Problems of overpopulation, of political and military pressures resulting from overpopulation, and of ecological decline, perhaps irreversible, also resulting from overpopulation. Our inability to face these problems with a kind of planetary consciousness, and, more importantly to act on them. We need hundred-year plans, but our governments change too much for there to be any plans at all. We are not conscious enough. But nature is saying to this species: If you want to make it, you have got to become more conscious. (194)

As is clear from the above, Strieber was thinking about human evolution and evolution of consciousness in terms of environmental pressures as far back as 1985. It is fully consistent with his own naturalism, the same naturalism the Master of the Key would promote later.

Strieber’s view in 1985 matches the Master of the Key’s in another respect. According to Strieber, overpopulation was responsible for the twentieth century’s wars:

“Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the human species has been tested by a continual growth of population that has gradually emerged as the central issue of existence. It is the primary reason why the twentieth century has been afflicted with so many wars. [...] (*Fear* 194)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Master of the Key cites overpopulation as a main cause of the Second World War and the Holocaust:

The Holocaust was triggered when economic disorder combined among the Germans with a feeling of being trapped due to overpopulation. The resultant explosion drove the German tribe to lash out against other tribes, especially the one that lived in its midst. (13)

46. EARTH A PRISON

The Master of the Key asserts a number of times that the earth is a prison and that man is imprisoned on it:

Why are you here?
You're chained to the ground. (12)

The wheel of life, as it is called by the Buddhists, is your prison.
The human soul is imprisoned?
It is imprisoned. [...]
Will this ever end?
Your enemy does not want it to end. They fear you too much.
When you see UFOs, you see prison guards. (54)

We are in chains, just as you said. But you also said you had the key.
This whole conversation is the key. You should bless your jailers, because without them you could never find your freedom. When you, as a species, remember why you have been imprisoned, and you face what you did, you will be free. (55)

The notion appears in an early form in *Communion*:

They might even want to imprison us here in our earth, or do worse than imprison us. (Three)

This is because the idea of intellectually and technologically advanced visitors who hide their knowledge from us is threatening and infuriating. It suggests that there is something ignoble about mankind, or even that we are prisoners on our planet. (Five)

47. EVOLVE OR GO EXTINCT

The basic premise of *The Key* is that mankind is going to go extinct in the not-too-distant future if it does not 'surrender' or 'return to the forest'—special terms of Strieber's that refer simultaneously to both biological and spiritual evolution. The timeframe of man's possible extinction is set for the next two thousand years (or 'age'), though the question of whether extinction is to occur will be settled much sooner:

I wish to ask about the future. What is our future?

The future of mankind is either to ascend or go extinct. The future of life on earth is, in either case, to evolve new intelligent creatures. Species of birds will become intelligent. Then, eons later, a species of insect. Like you, the insect species will have hands. They will remake the earth as you have, but never find the least evidence of your existence, nor will any memory of you, or history of you, persist in that time. They will walk the earth in a billion and a half years, at a time when it still has two billion years to live. For mankind, the matter will be decided in this century, however. (68)

Not surprisingly, this was Strieber’s view before the ‘true encounter’ as well. In a June 1994 Compuserve forum, Strieber wrote, for example:

I won’t stop until I die. This is the most important thing. If we get this right, mankind evolves. If not, we go extinct. And you’re looking at a very short timeframe. A century more, at most. ^[62]

It is perhaps worth also noting that the excerpt from *The Conversation* above may contain a tell-tale sign of its true origins. The Master of the Key says that the “matter” of whether man is to ascend or go extinct “will be decided in this century”. Strieber’s ‘true encounter’ is said to have taken place in 1998. The matter of man’s fate then would have had to have been decided in the closing years of the twentieth century. But given that the period amounted to only two-and-a-half years (June 6, 1998 to December 31, 2000), it was surely an odd way to express the fact. One might think “before the close of the century” or “before the turn of the millennium” less awkward — unless, of course, the reason why the Master of the Key put it in just this way was because he was speaking in anticipation of *The Key*’s publication in January 2001. The matter being “decided in this century” makes much more sense when referring to the twenty-first century.

48. HUMANS FROM OTHER WORLDS COMING HERE

At least as far back as June 1994, Strieber had the unusual opinion that human beings already lived on other worlds without our knowledge:

I suspect that human beings from other worlds in the physical

universe come here.^[63]

Not surprisingly, the Master of the Key presents this as fact:

Have any people from earth ever gone to other worlds?

A whole world of human beings has been evolved artificially off the planet, and they come and go freely.

What are you talking about?

Human beings are being born and raised off the earth. You can find their habitations if you look. They live in this solar system.

My God. How many?

Thousands.

What do they do here?

They help to enforce mankind's blindness by preventing science from exploring the key mysteries of the past and discovering a practical means of expanding into the universe. (37)

In addition, those familiar with Strieber's material know the tale of Strieber having been contacted by a man whose phone number was finally traced to the U. S. Department of Defense, a man who later was identified by Strieber from a photograph as one of the so-called Blonds or Nordic aliens.^[64]

Without naming the so-called Blonds or Nordics, the Master of the Key nevertheless makes sense of the Strieber anecdote:

Could aliens walk among us without our noticing?

By bending light, they can be invisible, and walk here to some extent, and also by using means to prevent you from looking at them by influencing your mind from a distance. But there are also those patterned on the same template as you, and they walk freely here. It is their job to enforce secrecy. This is the source of all the confusion about this. They appear, for example, to be part of your government, but they only use it as camouflage and as a source of power. Earthly institutions do not control the secrecy. It is controlled from a higher level. (36)

49. BUDDHA AND THE TREE, MUHAMMAD AND THE CAVE

Who were Mohammed and Buddha?

Exactly who history portrays them to have been. But to under-

stand what happened to them, you must understand that your entire pantheon of deities is you. God is you. The gods are you. Angels and demons are you. So it was mankind who spoke to Mohammed in his cave. So also, to Buddha under the Bhodi Tree, and to Christ in the desert. (27-28)

Pairing Buddha and the Bhodi tree and Muhammad and the cave is something of a favorite of Strieber's. In a 1988 interview Strieber answers:

Yep, but well look at it this way though. If you look at Paul on the road to Damascus; Mohammed in the cave; Buddha under the Bo-tree to a lesser extent [...] ^[65]

Muhammad and his cave appear again alongside Buddha and Jesus in *Transformation*:

Whatever the visitors are, I suspect they have been responsible for much paranormal phenomena, ranging from the appearance of gods, angels, fairies, ghosts and miraculous beings to the landing of UFOs in the backyards of America. It may be that what happened to Mohammed in his cave and to Christ in Egypt, to Buddha in his youth and to all our great prophets and seers, was an exalted version of the same humble experience that causes a flying saucer to traverse the sky or a visitor to appear in a bedroom. (*Trans* 54)

50. ENTROPY, DEATH-WISH, AND SIN

In *The Conversation* the concepts of entropy, mankind's 'death-wish', and sin appear as part of the Master of the Key's philosophical vocabulary. But they also belong to Strieber's vocabulary before the 'true encounter'. First *The Conversation*:

What is evil?

Entropy is the natural tendency of all things to disintegrate. Evil is the addition of intention to that process. Hate is like cold. It has an end. Love is like heat. It does not. (59)

What is sin?

Denial of the right to thrive. (74)

This hunger for self-destruction is the essence of your dark side, but we will speak of the death wish later. (47)

My God. Can anybody do anything?

You can write. Use your tool. But also, you will see the demon revealed in those who refuse to acknowledge the signs. Remember that there is within you a powerful death-urge. But remember also, the cycle I speak of is a natural one. If you look into the fossil record, you will find evidence of it before. Human activity has not caused it, but only sped it up.

What is this death wish? How does it work?

People give up on themselves. They do it down deep inside, in places that the elemental mind, that is contained in the brain, cannot access, places that remember all lives. (69)

In a 1988 interview with Leigh and Curtis, Strieber uses the same vocabulary:^[66]

This is something that has been with us ever since the concept of sin was invented and I think it's a TREMENDOUS mistake. I think it is the deathwish; it is entropy in consciousness that the truth of the matter is that everything that is wrong emerges, not out of something that mankind has done due to weakness or moral lapse, but out of nature.

Here Strieber is linking the “deathwish” with entropy in consciousness. The Master of the Key refers to a “death wish” or “death-urge” and defines evil in terms of entropy. The Master of the Key seems to be Strieber working through his concepts at a later stage of development.

51. FOURTH LEVEL OF MIND

The Master of the Key obliquely refers to a fourth level of mind, which has strong resonances with the Gurdjieff work:

A true human being has four levels of mind. Most of you have only three, and perhaps a vestige of the fourth. Your destiny is to enter the humanity of the universe. But you may not fulfill it.

Are there such things as alien abductions?

As you grow in fourth mind, you see more. (22)

Whatever the full meaning of the concept, Strieber was invoking it in his 1997 novella, *The Open Doors*:

She is not a demon, no she only seems such because she possesses what he recognizes as a fourth level of mind, a level that sees time as a shaped charge of memories [...]

As in *The Conversation*, in Strieber's novella a "fourth level of mind" involves a perception of time from the outside.

The "vestige" of the fourth mentioned by the Master of the Key refers to his assertions about the electromagnetic field that sends impressions to an area near the pineal gland — called "vestigial" in Gurdjieff-Ouspensky. After the war against God, this part of the brain was "turned off" and man became "time-bound" (56).

Of course, a fuller picture can be found by looking elsewhere in Strieber's work. In his usual fashion, Strieber finds a kind of scientific basis for the Gurdjieffian concept, using a now-outmoded model called the 'triune brain'. From his 2007 *Journal*:

Life has been growing here on earth for hundreds of millions of years, and has many times evolved three-brained beings like us. We are the only ones, however, who have ended up with hands and resonating vocal chords capable of complex speech and thus communication. [...]

And with the intelligence that has grown in the service of his needs, he can also begin to do what three-brained beings were meant to do, which is to live in inner harmony, to the point that we have the chance to see ourselves objectively, and therefore to affect what happens to our souls.

By three-brained, I mean that we have a reptilian or primitive brain that controls our nervous system and basic impulses, a mammalian, or mid-brain that mediates our emotional life, and a human or higher brain that reasons.

These three levels of the brain form the most energetic and evolutionary structure in the universe: a triad. The negative pole is the lowest level, because it can act only from impulse. The positive pole is the mid level, because it can mediate desires with

compassion and love. The harmonizing level is the highest level, the human level, which can balance the needs of the other two and so create a greater, harmonious whole, a fourth level of being that is beyond death and immortal.^[67]

This *Journal* entry was written well after the so-called ‘true encounter’, so it is included only to shed light on Strieber’s thinking. In the *Journal*, Strieber tries to find an anatomical basis for the Gurdjieffian notion of four levels of mind, locating the first three levels in the triune brain structure and even arranging them in a Gurdjieffian triad, while locating the fourth (Gurdjieff’s so-called objective consciousness) beyond the material, just as he was doing in his 1997 *The Open Doors*.

52. MAN IS EARTH’S MIND

Ah. I’m lost.

All physical being includes the same elements, and thus all are part of the earth and of each other. Living bodies are the consciousness of the planet. Man is earth’s mind. If man kills earth, then earth has committed suicide, because its mind has [not] reached the next level, which is ecstatic union with the rest of the universe. (30)

In the above, unique to the Walker & Collier, there appears to be a confusing typo: the omission of the word “not”. It may account for why in the Tarcher the answer is completely rewritten. Regardless, the assertion that “Man is earth’s mind” was already being made by Strieber in this interview published in Winter’s 1985 *Faces of Fear*:

I think the Green movement in Germany is tremendously important, because it looks upon the planet as a unified single being, [...] the body of the earth itself as part of this one enormous, extraordinary creature which is striving to become conscious. It has created mankind, which is, of course, the consciousness it is seeking. You can look upon mankind as the earth’s effort to become conscious of itself. (202)

The idea in the Walker & Collier passage above that it is the earth that is seeking “ecstatic union” with the rest of the universe through mankind is even suggested in the interview as Strieber continues:

And as we mature as a species, our consciousness will expand to go beyond just ourselves as individuals and then as a whole species, and come to include the whole planet, and eventually, the solar system and the galaxy and the universe. I think then we will truly join the world. (202)

53. VETERINARIAN AND THE KITTEN - AND MORE

Are there such things as alien abductions?

As you grow in fourth mind, you see more.

Many of these encounters are brutal.

The kitten is terrified of the veterinarian. To subdue the little creature, violence is unavoidable. (22)

From *Whitley's Journal* – January 2, 2000:

The simple truth is that the visitors, while being quite different from us and treating us in ways that make us uncomfortable, are not hostile to us. There are no hostile aliens here at all, not in any form. The horror stories about them are similar in every respect to the stories a little kitten might tell of its visit to the veterinary. Also, a great number of the horror stories originate with an American intelligence community bent on retaining control of the society for the existing power structure even in the context of contact.

I am in an interesting situation. The great battles of my life have already been fought and won. The fact that I was able to open my eyes and admit the visitors into my conscious mind was the greatest of those battles. To understand why this was so hard, it is necessary to understand the true nature of sin and the depths of human denial?what in the bible is called the fall of man, and to know the strength of the that which so ardently and patiently seeks our destruction. We must understand that everything we do is etched upon us permanently, and we do not want to face that. There is only one way into contact and into the kingdom, to come to rest in God.

Life with the visitors is at once far more sublime and ?civilized? than life among us. You get used very quickly to not having any secrets, and when you return to this existence and find that everybody is full of secrets, it's very odd. It is important to live in

such a way that you don't need your secrets, because if you want to be close to the visitors and the people who have a foot on their side of the line, you will not be able to keep them. The world of the visitors is a place where the truth is known. It is surrendered, profoundly surrendered, to the uses of God. ^[68]

This *Journal* entry a full year before the publication of *The Key* anticipates a number of major themes and motifs from *The Conversation*: the kitten and the veterinarian, the nature of sin, human denial, the fall of man, every deed being “etched” upon us permanently, and being “surrendered” to God. From Strieber’s message board postings in late 2000, it appears that the above *Journal* comes well before he began work in earnest on *The Key* in the second half of 2000. But even supposing that the words and thoughts expressed here came from the ‘true encounter’, it is remarkable how completely those themes and motifs were incorporated into Strieber’s thinking and presented without attribution. It is as if there was simply no firm line between the Master of the Key and Whitley Strieber. Of course, it has already been shown that arguably all were alive in Strieber’s discourse before that night in Toronto with the exception of the kitten-and-veterinarian metaphor.

It is obvious from this series of comparisons that Strieber borrows heavily from himself in *The Key*. Despite what Strieber rather weakly maintains in the introduction to the Tarcher, it cannot be simply that he was thinking along the same lines as the Master of the Key in certain of his speculations prior to June 1998. Rather, all of the important elements are there in specificity: ecstasy, return to the forest, surrender, superposition, the destruction of souls, conscious machines, the story of the pig, conscious energy, and so on. Even Strieber’s pet fascinations are there: Wicca, Meister Eckhart, the gas chamber.

The evidence points to *The Conversation* being an especially lucid organization and expression of a variety of thoughts nascent in Strieber’s mind for many years. We would have to forget everything we know about intellectual development in other authors and influences upon them to follow Strieber in thinking that the ideas of *The Conversation* originate with an otherworldly visitor. Of course, as we have seen, many of the ideas are not Strieber’s own. He takes from Gurdjieff-Ouspensky and he takes from Talbot and presents these ideas as his. He also takes theories that are *au courant* in the science news and presents them as bold predictions.

SCIENCE NEWS

Most of the spiritual content here is a farrago of nearly every New Age preoccupation imaginable — aliens, reincarnation, time travel, millennial disaster, Atlantis, etc.—“proved” by highly credulous readings of popular science articles.^[69]

—*Publisher’s Weekly* review of *The Secret School*

“Well, I read my share of science journals and I say it is!”

— ‘General Samson’, 2012: *The War for Souls*

A **CONSTANT FEATURE** of Strieber’s non-fiction is its heavy reliance on popular science literature and scientific journals. In *The Secret School* (1997), for example, a book purportedly about early childhood experiences, Strieber supports his accounts with references to *New Scientist*, the *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society*, *Nature*, *The Psychological Bulletin*, science news in the *New York Times*, *Scientific American*, *Science News*, and *Harper’s*. Strieber’s online *Journal* and his audio interviews routinely involve Strieber roping in the latest science news, and even some of his novels are not immune: Strieber could not resist appending to his novel *The Omega Point* an “Author’s Note” in which he cited *New Scientist*, an article on charged particles by a certain Dr. Alexei Dimitriev, and Teresa McDonald of the University of Kansas Natural History Museum.

Given Strieber’s frequent recourse to science news, one might ask: is it possible to locate in the science news of the period any of the Master of the Key’s bold scientific observations or predictions?



THE SUPERSTORM

I did not know much about what he was saying at the time but it turned out to pretty much all be in different bits and pieces in the scientific evidence that I found.^[70]

The interesting thing about it is that he said it as far as I know before anyone else had — certainly before I’d heard it anywhere else. But once again, I looked up and found this would be one of the critical mechanisms of global warming. And of course, at the time the book — the *Superstorm* was written a year later when I was actually using some of this information from him, none of

this was believed at all by science.^[71]

[T]he book *Superstorm* is based on some explanations of the structure of climate change that he discussed and talked about, and which were considered completely ridiculous at the time but have now been generally accepted as true.^[72]

WHETHER OR NOT Whitley Strieber is a liar, it is demonstrable that he has a knack for not only being wrong, but exactly wrong. The four statements above made between 2003 to 2015 say in effect that: a) Strieber did not know ‘much’ about any superstorm scenario before his ‘true encounter’; b) the scenario was only described in ‘bits and pieces in the scientific literature’; c) there was no belief in the scenario by scientists; d) the scenario is now generally accepted.

First, these self-serving statements are belied by what Strieber himself wrote in the Walker & Collier:

This statement turned out to be a very exact description of a process that has been discussed for some years within the paleoclimatological community as an explanation for climatic upheavals in the past, and we were able to actually use their findings in *Superstorm* to support our theory. (89)

Strieber said that in 2001, the Master of the Key’s sudden climate change scenario happened to be a “very exact description” of a scenario discussed among scientists “for some years”. If so, and we shall see that it is so, it would certainly militate against the statement made in 2003 that “none of this was believed by science” since scientists had been entertaining the idea. It would then remain only to be seen whether Strieber knew ‘much’ about this scenario before his ‘true encounter’ and to what extent the sudden climate change scenario is “generally accepted as true”.

Whether a sudden climate change scenario, perhaps including a superstorm, is “generally accepted as true” by today’s climate scientists is left to the reader. But it should be noted in passing that at least two elements of the Master of the Key’s 2001 scenario are today being questioned: when and to what extent the land bridge between the Americas rose;^[73] and b) and whether its emergence was in any way responsible for the initiation of ice ages.^[74]

As for whether Strieber knew “much” about a sudden climate change

scenario prior to his 'true encounter', one must start with Strieber's own account of how he was introduced to this scenario.

According to Strieber in *The Prophecy of the Key*, the statements made by the Master of the Key about sudden climate change led directly to the book *The Coming Global Superstorm* written with Art Bell. As result of what he had been told during the 'true encounter', Strieber began to research the matter and discovered there was supporting material in the scientific literature:

The one thing that their studies did not confirm was the storm itself. In "The Great Climate Flip-flop" by William H. Calvin in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January of 1998, it was postulated that the change had come very quickly in the past. (89)

The scientific material cited at the end of *The Coming Global Superstorm* dates to March 1999, suggesting it was then that the book was finished. There is presently no way to know when the writing of the book started, and it may well have started only after the 'true encounter'. The question becomes whether Strieber showed signs of knowing what the Master of the Key was to tell him regarding sudden climate change and the 'superstorm' scenario prior to their 'true encounter' of June 6, 1998.

First we must review what the Master of the Key actually said in *The Conversation*. He begins with the assertion that the earth is a "trap" (12), that mankind is "trapped" on earth (13), that extinction of the human race (i.e. "the destruction of six billion") may well occur at least as result of overpopulation (13) though also Mankind's activity is threatening to "destroy the earth" (15). *The Conversation* then takes a long detour into what man must do in order to survive (surrender to God and return to the forest 14, 15). Again on page 38, it is stated that "Mankind [...] is destined either to go extinct or to ascend" though still no mention is made of how precisely Man will go extinct. On page 56, it is said that Man has "come to the end of the resources" he was given, and on page 57 that the consumer society is a mechanism in the possible extinction: "mankind will never again lust after material wealth". Certainly, overpopulation, exhaustion of natural resources, and pollution all have an environmental dimension, but none of these imply a specific extinction scenario.

Finally, on page 68, with just seven pages left in the dialogue, the extinction scenario is given:

How will it be decided?

The climate will begin to change in 2000, and this process will accelerate over the next decades. There is a great cycle of climate that began 2.8 million years ago and has resulted in the fundamental destabilization of your world's weather system. You evolved intelligence in order to survive the sudden shifts back and forth from ice ages to temperate periods. In fact, this planetary instability has been the engine of your evolution. The cycle is about to change, and to challenge you again.

Why will this happen?

Warmth being retained near the surface by greenhouse elements results in cooling aloft. A massive and extremely powerful convection can arise that results in a storm so great that it changes the climate permanently.

What form will this take?

The next ice age will begin soon, and this will lead to the extinction of mankind, or to a massive reduction in population, given your inability to expand off the planet. This planet is at present a death trap.

Why will this happen?

Because air at the surface is getting warmer, the north polar ice is melting, reducing the salinity of the Laurentian sea. At some point, winds crossing this sea due to the increasing difference between lower and higher atmospheric pressures will warm the northern ocean so much that the temperature differential needed to pump the North Atlantic Current will not be sufficient, and the current will slow down, stop, or stop flowing so far north. This same mechanism always triggers ice ages, and would happen within a few thousand years no matter what. However, human activity has sped up the process of atmospheric warming, so the change will be sooner and stronger. The greater part of human industry and culture, along with the species' most educated populations, will be destroyed in a single season. This will happen suddenly and without warning, or rather, the warning will not be recognized for what it is.

What will it be?

First, the surface features of the currents will slow down. This will result in violent storms in Europe. At some point, arctic temperatures will rise forty or more points above normal during a spring or summer season. Then the currents themselves will

change their routes or stop. Cold air trapped above the arctic will plunge down and collide with the warm tropical air present at the surface. It will create the most powerful storms in ten thousand years, storms unlike any you have seen or imagined. They will bring about the end of the northern civilization and the climate change that follows will lead to the starvation of billions.

My God. Can anybody do anything?

You can write. Use your tool. But also, you will see the demon revealed in those who refuse to acknowledge the signs. Remember that there is within you a powerful death-urge. But remember also, the cycle I speak of is a natural one. If you look into the fossil record, you will find evidence of it before. Human activity has not caused it, but only sped it up. (68-69)

At a glance, the Master of the Key's superstorm scenario appears quite novel. It does not reflect the consensus view, i.e. of runaway global warming, which was Strieber's own view in his 1986 book *Nature's End*. There is even something logically satisfying in the notion that nature is self-correcting, and that the earth's global weather system has a failsafe whatever the deep and radical consequences for mankind.

The scenario here can be broken into the following parts:

1. The world's weather system was fundamentally "destabilized" 2.8 million years ago. We experience this instability as the alteration between ice ages and temperate periods.
2. This planetary instability is specifically the cause, the "engine" of mankind's evolution, the reason why man "evolved intelligence".
3. We are already due for a new ice age according to the natural cycle, but man's activity has sped it up.
4. Why this will happen is two-sided: first, greenhouse gases (presumably natural and man-made) cause heat that would otherwise gradually rise through the atmosphere to linger near the surface more than it should. This means colder temperatures above. At some point, the air temperature differential between atmospheric layers means conditions are in place for a massive storm.
5. At the same time, warmer air near the surface melts arctic ice, lowering the salinity of the "Laurentian sea", while (warm) winds traveling across this sea cause the North Atlantic Current to slow down, stop, or move south.
6. When the North Atlantic Current changes direction or stops, unnaturally cold air above the arctic will suddenly be able to "plunge

down”, mix with the unnaturally warm air at the surface and so doing, produce “the most powerful storms in ten thousand years”.

7. These storms will specifically lead to the “starvation of billions” and the destruction of the “greater part of human industry and culture”.

Now we will examine Strieber’s 2004 claim that the scenario above existed only in “bits and pieces” in the scientific literature. That claim was already contradicted by his 2001 statement that it is a “very exact description” of a scenario already discussed by scientists. But showing just what information was available in the popular scientific literature serves as a preliminary step to asking how much of this scenario was known to Strieber before the ‘true encounter’.

One can begin with the article Strieber himself mentions in both published introductions to *The Key*. The cover story of the January 1998 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* was an article called “The Great Climate Flip-flop” by William H. Calvin. Looking for support in the article for the seven points identified in the Master of the Key’s scenario one finds every point supported:

1. The world’s weather system entered into “climatic instability” three million years ago with “flips” between ice ages and temperate periods “every few thousand years or so”:

There used to be a tropical shortcut, an express route from Atlantic to Pacific, but continental drift connected North America to South America about three million years ago, damming up the easy route for disposing of excess salt. The dam, known as the Isthmus of Panama, may have been what caused the ice ages to begin a short time later, simply because of the forced detour. This major change in ocean circulation, along with a climate that had already been slowly cooling for millions of years, led not only to ice accumulation most of the time but also to climatic instability, with flips every few thousand years or so.

2. The “ape-sized hominid brain began to develop” in response to climate changes, and the development of civilization in the most recent temperate period is an expression of that evolution:

The back and forth of the ice itself started 2.5 million years ago, which is also when the ape-sized hominid brain began to develop into a fully human one, four times as large and reorganized for

language, music, and chains of inference. Ours is now a brain able to anticipate outcomes well enough to practice ethical behavior, able to head off disasters in the making by extrapolating trends. Our civilizations began to emerge immediately after the great continental ice sheets melted about 10,000 years ago. Civilizations accumulate knowledge, so we now know a lot about what has been going on, what has made us what we are. We puzzle over oddities, such as the climate of Europe.

3. Man-made “global warming” could trigger an abrupt cooling, leading to an ice age that the world may be already due for:

Now we know -- and from an entirely different group of scientists exploring separate lines of reasoning and data -- that the most catastrophic result of global warming could be an abrupt cooling. [...]

We are near the end of a warm period in any event; ice ages return even without human influences on climate. The last warm period abruptly terminated 13,000 years after the abrupt warming that initiated it, and we’ve already gone 15,000 years from a similar starting point.

4.- 6. Calvin discusses the possible “great climate flip-flop” in terms of ocean salinity just as the Master of the Key does:

Yet another precursor [...] would be the addition of fresh water to the ocean surface, diluting the salt-heavy surface waters before they became unstable enough to start sinking. More rain falling in the northern oceans -- exactly what is predicted as a result of global warming -- could stop salt flushing. So could ice carried south out of the Arctic Ocean.

There is also a great deal of unsalted water in Greenland’s glaciers, just uphill from the major salt sinks. The last time an abrupt cooling occurred was in the midst of global warming. Many ice sheets had already half melted, dumping a lot of fresh water into the ocean.

A brief, large flood of fresh water might nudge us toward an abrupt cooling even if the dilution were insignificant when averaged over time.

Importantly, there is no mention of atmospheric temperature differentials or “superstorms” in this article. It is a point to which we will return.

7. A sudden climate flip-flop will lead to the loss of “much of civilization” and worldwide starvation:

I hope never to see a failure of the northernmost loop of the North Atlantic Current, because the result would be a population crash that would take much of civilization with it, all within a decade. [...]

The population-crash scenario is surely the most appalling. Plummeting crop yields would cause some powerful countries to try to take over their neighbors or distant lands -- if only because their armies, unpaid and lacking food, would go marauding, both at home and across the borders. [...]

Present-day Europe has more than 650 million people. It has excellent soils, and largely grows its own food. It could no longer do so if it lost the extra warming from the North Atlantic. [...]

Any abrupt switch in climate would also disrupt food-supply routes. The only reason that two percent of our population can feed the other 98 percent is that we have a well-developed system of transportation and middlemen -- but it is not very robust. The system allows for large urban populations in the best of times, but not in the case of widespread disruptions.

What is perhaps most remarkable about the overlap between the Master of the Key’s sudden climate change scenario and Calvin’s is that Calvin, a neurophysiologist and not a climatologist, goes out of his way to make the assertion that climate change is what drove evolution of the human brain. The Master of the Key does the same. Also significant is that both scenarios point to starvation as the most direct outcome of sudden climate change. Both even discuss sudden climate change in terms of the destruction of “civilization” and to the same extent, the Master of the Key saying that the “greater part of industry and culture” will be lost while Calvin’s phrase is “much of civilization”.

Clearly, rather than the sudden climate change scenario described in *The Conversation* existing only in “bits and pieces” prior to the ‘true encounter’, waiting for a Master of the Key to synthesize all the information, a full outline of the scenario was present in just one article which Strieber claimed to have found only after the encounter. The main

difference remains that there is no mention of any superstorm in Calvin's article. Calvin speaks only of "stronger storms" and "intensifying storms".

But does the Master of the Key himself call for a single giant storm?

What will it be?

First, the surface features of the currents will slow down. This will result in violent storms in Europe. At some point, arctic temperatures will rise forty or more points above normal during a spring or summer season. Then the currents themselves will change their routes or stop. Cold air trapped above the arctic will plunge down and collide with the warm tropical air present at the surface. It will create the most powerful storms in ten thousand years, storms unlike any you have seen or imagined. They will bring about the end of the northern civilization and the climate change that follows will lead to the starvation of billions. (69)

The Master of the Key uses the plural ("storms") and never the term 'superstorm'. Of course, powerful storms that are "unlike any [...] seen or imagined" could well merge as they sweep across a hemisphere and might be indistinguishable from one another. But it is noteworthy that in this regard, whatever Strieber's *The Coming Global Superstorm*, the Master of the Key's scenario tallies with the popular science literature, in this case, Calvin's article.

And what of *The Coming Global Superstorm*? The book's chapters alternate between non-fiction exposition and a fictional scenario. Only toward the end in the fictional scenario do the multiple competing storms merge more or less into a single superstorm which is when the non-fiction chapters adopt the term.

Thus, in comparing the Master of the Key scenario with what was available in the popular science literature — indeed, the one item cited by Strieber himself though purportedly discovered by him only after the fact — there is point-by-point agreement. Strieber differs from Calvin's sudden climate change scenario in two small ways: he locates the genesis of the storms in a widening atmospheric temperature differential not foregrounded among Calvin's details. Strieber also exaggerates the suddenness and the severity of the storm(s). While Calvin spreads such a change across at least a decade, Strieber and the Master of the Key set it within a "single season". As to why, one can point to Strieber's own native catastrophism and to his notions about flash-frozen woolly

mammoths presented in *The Secret School*:

Certainly, it is beyond serious dispute that there was a catastrophe on this planet about twelve thousand years ago. The remains of this catastrophe are plain to see in the geologic record. They include the bodies of thousands of large mammals all across the arctic circle, quick-frozen with food still in their mouths, grasses frozen in the tender of spring, trees frozen with buds still intact on their boughs. (168–9)

Clearly, Strieber could have been drawing on the Calvin piece when he was composing the Master of the Key's sudden climate change warning in *The Key*. According to Strieber, he only became aware of a superstorm scenario after the Toronto encounter at which point he began to seriously investigate it. The question must be asked: does Strieber demonstrate any awareness of sudden climate change or the 'superstorm' scenario prior to the June 6, 1998, 'true encounter'?

In a near-lost interview Strieber gave to radiovalve.net while on his *Confirmation* book tour in May 1998 — a month before the 'true encounter' — Strieber describes the climate change scenario then on his mind:

As the temperature differentials between the tropics and the arctic region become less and less, circulation of the ocean declines because it depends on the temperature differential for the strength of the currents. You could end up in the ironic situation where global warming causes the gulf stream to stop flowing as far north as it does now and start dissipating in the Bay of Biscay, say. In which case, global warming causes Scotland to become like Lapland and England like northern Norway in a matter of one or two seasons.^[75]

Interestingly we find here the missing concept of atmospheric temperature differentials. Strieber presents the above specifically in the context of ice-melt in the Antarctic, and looking through the science news of the period one finds a possible candidate for Strieber's source: an article by William K. Stevens in January 27, 1998, edition of the *New York Times*. The article discusses the work of Wallace Broecker, a proponent of this scenario in the context of antarctic ice melt. Is there reason to suppose Strieber may have seen this article? For one, as is clear, Strieber heavily relies on the *New York Times* and other outlets. But

second, on a February 5, 1998, broadcast of Coast to Coast AM, Art Bell refers to this *Times* article in his news segment, quoting Broecker: “the climate system is an angry beast”. It suggests the sudden climate change scenario had entered the Art Bell milieu by early 1998, fully consistent with the eager end-times mindset of Coast to Coast AM in that period.

Strieber was also writing about ocean currents and the loss of northern Europe in his *Journal* dated January 12, 1998, six months before the ‘true encounter’.^[76]

Our lives depend upon the flow of the ocean currents, which distribute heat and cold around the planet. The most important of these currents is probably the Gulf Stream, in that it keeps the Northeastern US, eastern Canada and parts of Northern Europe, especially the British Isles, much warmer than they would otherwise be.

Warming of the waters in the southern hemisphere threaten ocean circulation, which is powered by the difference in temperature between water near the poles and water closer to the equator. The more even these temperatures become, the more likely it becomes that the currents will get less powerful.

Should the Gulf Stream collapse south, the British Isles will experience a severe change in climate and could even become uninhabitable, at least by as many people as are there now.

And a year before that *Journal* entry, Strieber did an interview with Art Bell on February 12, 1997, in which he discussed salinity and water temperature being affected by the melting of the Larsen ice shelf; drastic oceanic temperature change in the space of a few decades; and the Gulf Stream changing direction which:

could really just very quickly transform Norway and England into climates that are similar to the climate of Greenland. That is the worst case scenario.

Finally, in *The Secret School*, which appeared in hardcover in January 1997, we have Strieber’s concerns about sudden climate change involving meltwater and the loss of northern Europe.^[77]

One of the things that reviewers of *Transformation* were particularly derisive about was the prediction that the poles might

melt, because this was based in part on predictions derived from the Marian visions that took place at Fatima. In the book, I pointed out that the New York Times had described 1987 as “a year of extraordinary glacial breakup.” This process has continued and worsened. On April 29, 1995, Science News stated, “The floating Larsen Ice Shelf lost three major pieces earlier this year,” giving off an iceberg the size of Rhode Island.

[...]

Scientists claim that even partial melting of the ice could have catastrophic consequences, causing massive rises in sea levels.

One of the still-detached memories I have from my childhood involves ice coming down the sides of a mountain called Ben Bulbin in the British Isles. In this recollection, I see England involved in a horrific catastrophe, a devastating change of climate that turns it into a deep freeze.

It is interesting that the suddenness of this change has recently been corroborated by new scientific insights about climate change. Researchers from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, in examining ice core samples, have discovered that temperature changes of seven degrees Celsius may take place over just a few decades. “Our results suggest that the present climate system could be very delicately poised,” according to researcher Scott Lehman, as quoted by Ross Gelbspan in the December 1995 Harper’s.

What happened in the past was that the North Atlantic was warmed by fresh water coming in from increased rainfall and glacial melt, which changed the direction of warming ocean currents from northeasterly to due east.

According to the New Scientist of November 11, 1995, “relatively small increases in the amount of freshwater entering the North Atlantic could cool Western Europe by several degrees Celsius.” According to oceanographer Stefan Rahmstorf, the weather will change radically if the fresh water flowing into the North Atlantic increases by 25 percent. Great Britain would become like Greenland over the course of a few years. If that happened, the ice would certainly flow down Ben Bulbin once again. (197-199)

It looks as if moving back into the mid-nineties when the melting of the antarctic ice dominated the news, Strieber’s concern was with antarctic melt-water disrupting conditions in the north Atlantic. By 2000

when arctic melt was the greater concern, Strieber (and the Master of the Key) relocated the trigger for the global catastrophe to the northern hemisphere.

There was also a very good literary reason for this. In *The Conversation*, the Master of the Key makes reference to the “northern peoples” and “northern civilization” (52, 69). At a glance this can appear to be a subtle argument for the dialogue’s authenticity. After all, one is accustomed to seeing human civilization presented as an east-west affair; whereas from orbit the use of electric light is by far more visible in the northern hemisphere, and nearly all of the world’s most powerful countries, politically speaking, are in the northern hemisphere as well. An otherworldly being might well look at the earth and see a single, dominant northern civilization.

In fact, mention of the “northern peoples” and their civilization is a callback to alien abductee Betty Andreasson Luca, who while under hypnosis spoke in a “star language”. When subsequently translated out of Gaelic, she purportedly had said:

The living descendants of the Northern peoples are groping in universal darkness. Their mother mourns. A dark occasion forebodes when weakness in high places will revive a high cost of living; an interval of mistakes in high places; an interval fit for distressing events. ^[78]

The above appears in none other than Whitley Strieber’s *Transformation*, and Strieber has at various times suggested he either was asked to pay for the translation work or initiated it personally. Strieber has referred to the quote directly several times on his podcast.

Since *The Conversation* includes a moral indictment of the “northern peoples” and their civilization, it is entirely appropriate to locate the site of the disaster visited upon them in the northern hemisphere. Something of a giveaway of Strieber’s decision to highlight the “northern” aspect appears on page 68 where reference is made to the “northern ocean”. While the ‘Southern ocean’ is the name given by geographers to the seas around Antarctica, there is no “northern ocean” per se. Strieber uses the name “northern ocean” to create linguistic guilt by association and, of course, because it sounds portentous.

Interestingly, one feature of the imminent destruction of the “northern civilization” perhaps already underway is that of methane outgassing. Not only bubbling jets in the ocean but melting permafrost

and quite possibly giant sinkholes in Siberia since the time of the ‘true encounter’ may be down to the release of methane, a greenhouse gas thirty times worse than carbon dioxide.^[79] Yet the Master of the Key does not mention methane.

How could Strieber fail to put methane into the Master of the Key’s disaster scenario? After all, from Strieber’s work one can get the impression that there has never been a catastrophe that Strieber did not like. In *The Secret School* alone, melting glaciers, holes in the ozone layer, cometary impacts, and more are presented as real possibilities, even imminent dangers. Strieber himself was warning about methane outgassing in April 2011, for example, in a ‘climate special’ whose advertisement read in part: “Beginning with his book *Nature’s End* in 1985, Whitley has never been wrong about our changing climate”. How could the Master of the Key fail to mention such a lurid occurrence as giant sinkholes due to methane outgassing?

The likely reason is that methane was hardly mentioned in *The Great Climate Flip-flop*. Thus it did not make enough of an impression on Strieber’s memory. Here one sees some of the limits on the Master of the Key’s ability to prophesy: whether it has been in the science news and the extent to which Strieber is able to recall the details. This latter shows itself when the Master of the Key recommends that we use nitrous oxide in the construction of “intelligent machines”.



NITROUS OXIDE

I’ve gotten accusations, ‘Oh, you wrote it yourself.’ You can’t. It’s impossible. No one in 1998 or even in 2002 when it was published would ever have offered an opinion that a gas could be a form of computer memory. Never! Who would think that?^[80]

IT IS CLEAR that Strieber was familiar with the sudden climate change scenario that was being discussed in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the *New York Times*, and elsewhere prior to his ‘true encounter’. It is also clear that he not only dissembled later about its general status in the scientific literature, but seemed to be in a sort of wild denial about his own familiarity with it, forgetting his discussions of the disruption of ocean currents, dramatic cooling, and the loss of northern Europe in interviews and in his writings before the Toronto event ever took place. Of course, his degree of success at getting across the complex sudden climate change scenario using the Master of the Key as his mouthpiece was limited not

only by the space available in *The Conversation* but Strieber's own grasp of the details. As seen, Strieber presented a simplified view and omitted mention of methane outgassing.

The issue of Strieber's grasp of the details surfaces again with the Master of the Key's declarations that nitrous oxide "will bear memory" (64). The full exchange from *The Conversation* is as follows:

Could we develop machines more intelligent than ourselves?

You are lagging in this area. You cannot understand how to create machines with enough memory density and the independent ability to correlate that is essential to the emergence of intelligence. You waste your time trying to create programs that simulate intelligence. Without very large scale memory in an infinitely flexible system, this will never happen.

Any specific design suggestions?

Gas is an important component to consider in the construction of intelligent machines. Nitrous oxide will bear memory. Also, you may find ways of using superposition in very fast, very able quantum memory chips. (63-64)

The question should be asked: Is there any scientific support for the Master of the Key's suggestion about using nitrous oxide in the construction of intelligent machines?^[81] Or put another way: is there anything in the popular scientific literature at around the time of the 'true encounter' to explain Strieber's use of this concept in *The Conversation*?

In fact, if one is willing to suppose that Strieber made a mistake by writing of nitrous oxide instead of nitric oxide, there is clear support. In 1992 *Science* named nitric oxide the "molecule of the year" and called it "first in a new class of neurotransmitters".^[82] One 1997 article examined the role of nitric oxide in 'non-local learning',^[83] while another that same year was entitled: *Nitric oxide: what can it compute?*^[84] In October 1998, the *New York Times* reported that three scientists were being awarded the Nobel Prize for work on nitric oxide, declaring that nitric oxide was being studied for its influence on human memory.^[85] A 1998 academic article called "Neural Signalling: It's a Gas!" stated among other things that nitric oxide was diffuse throughout the nervous system and essential to brain function. This finding was radical inasmuch as it challenged the model of neuron-to-neuron communication:

The discovery that the gas Nitric Oxide (NO) is a neuronal

signalling molecule has radically altered our thinking about how information is transmitted in the brain. Traditionally, neurotransmission is thought to be spatially and temporally restricted and from the pre-synaptic to the post-synaptic neuron. However the release of NO does not require specialized point-to-point synaptic contacts and unlike traditional neurotransmitters, NO can diffuse through cell membranes. NO may therefore act without the need for conventional synaptic connectivity and its action is not necessarily locally confined to the immediate post-synaptic neuron.^[86]

Thus in the mid-to-late nineteen-nineties nitric oxide was being named as a component of human memory, and was being seen as able to somehow compute and hold information outside the usual neural-synaptic apparatus in a diffuse, non-local way. This understanding is already one part of the Master of the Key's strange suggestion that a gas could "bear memory". If nitric oxide could manage to do this within the brain free of the neural apparatus, in principle it could do it outside the brain as a free-floating gas. But what about nitric oxide in connection with "intelligent machines", that is, artificial intelligence?

Again it is useful to refer to the article Strieber himself cites in *The Key*. After all, one often finds there is a retroactive maneuver in Strieber's work: after prophesying or describing a 'vision' or detailing some recovered memory, Strieber then finds support for it in the science literature — the same science literature over which it is clear he is constantly poring, making it likely that he knew of the 'support' before his prophecy, vision, or memory was formed, a fact then banished from his mind entirely as happened with the superstorm scenario.

The article cited by Strieber in *The Key* was in the October 1998 *New Scientist*, called "Gas on the Brain". It described how scientists were using simulations of the behavior of gas in the creation of artificial intelligence networks, so-called 'gas nets':

But while your brain has 100 billion neurons interlinked in a huge electrochemical mesh, neural networks are made up of purely electronic neurons, known as "nodes" — typically about 100 of them. And while every neuron in the brain connects to some 10,000 others, nodes in a neural network are lucky if they are wired to a few dozen of their peers.

Clearly this leaves plenty of scope for computer scientists to

make these machines smarter, more adaptable and altogether more brainlike.

One of the chief routes towards this goal has been to increase the number of nodes and the richness of their interconnections. So how is it that researchers in Britain, at the University of Sussex, have managed to create devices with the capability of large, complex neural nets that consist of just a handful of nodes and sometimes not a single interconnection?

The answer, which is inspired once again by the workings of the human brain, lies in a virtual gas. The researchers' approach, which they presented last month in Skövde, Sweden, at the International Conference on Artificial Neural Networks, opens the way for a new generation of powerful, lean computers, which they call "gas nets".

Of course, these scientists were not basing their new simulated networks on just any gas:

A decade ago, brain researchers were surprised to find that a neurotransmitter could spread its modulatory message to distant neurons. Stranger still is that in large quantities this simple chemical is toxic and has a bad reputation as a constituent of photochemical smog. That chemical is nitric oxide (NO).

The researchers doing the simulations were basing their updated models on ideas about the behavior of nitric oxide in the brain.

The *New Scientist* article underlines the difficulties in doing simulations, even the innovative kind being discussed. Strieber, interested in putting bold predictions in the mouth of the Master of the Key, probably drew some shrewd inferences: if nitric oxide was a part of human memory and it was being discussed in connection with simulations of neural networks, would it not simply be better to use the gas directly and create real intelligence using the gas? Given the inherent difficulties in doing simulations, this would be the forward-looking view: "You waste your time trying to create programs that simulate intelligence" (64). The rub emerged during the compositional process — the "most difficult writing struggle" of his life (7) — when Strieber 'remembered' the Master of the Key saying nitrous oxide instead of nitric oxide. This strange error thus robbed the Master of the Key of the basic context of one of his most prescient scientific visions.

STRIEBER AND THE GOSPELS

And once again at this point, there are echoes, very interesting echoes of the Gospels — mostly all of the biblical allusions in here are gospel allusions. They're very subtle.^[87]

STRIEBER makes this point in one of his audio commentaries on *The Key*, and it is an accurate one: there are at least two dozen different biblical allusions in *The Conversation*.^[88] The Bible clearly has an influence on *The Key* in a way the Koran or other scriptures do not. While Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam are said in *The Conversation* to form a Gurdjieffian triad as “one system in three” (27), Christianity is clearly favored in the Master of the Key’s world-historical account: it is the appearance of Christ that marks the change to the age of Pisces and represents a preservation of a purported age-old knowledge that the soul survives death. Furthermore, concepts like ascension, the fall of man, and so on clearly flow out of Christianity, even if they are not exclusive to it.

That Christianity would have a favored status in *The Conversation*, of course, is consistent with Strieber’s own Catholicism. Had the Master of the Key’s discourse reflected an erudition in Buddhism or Islam that was outside Strieber’s own passing familiarity with both, it would have argued for the authenticity of the ‘true encounter’. As it is, the presentation of the Master of the Key’s particular brand of Christianity is not only consistent with Strieber’s own (e.g. “be as little children”), the figure himself represents a special kind of Catholic fantasy for Strieber.

Whatever Strieber’s somewhat ambivalent storytelling after the encounter about the Master of the Key perhaps being a Micmac indian, a member of the Knights Templar, or even a drummer in a Texas orchestra, *The Conversation* paints a reasonably unambiguous picture of what the Master of the Key figure really was: he is someone on a mission of ecstasy (24) “wandering the earth” (30) for perhaps a lifetime waiting for the moment when he was able to present Whitley Strieber with the “new vision” of God and man. When asked if he was dead, the Master of the Key answers in the affirmative (29). He establishes that he is holographically living and dying with all beings and that he is in ecstasy (30). The Master of the Key is thus even able to speak as God Himself at one point:

If you passively let them confine the wealth and keep the secrets, I will overturn your world yet again. (47)

That it is God who overturns worlds is confirmed later:

I don't remember a thing.

Your species bears a wound in its soul that makes you deny the reality of the past that is plainly visible all around you. Mars was murdered by you. At that point, intervention occurred, as it will again when you destroy this planet, as will probably happen. This is the trigger for intervention, the destruction of a living world.

Who intervenes?

God acts.

That is to say, you.

Remember that God is holographic. Thus all act when God acts.

You act. (55–56)

Even the image of the Master of the Key ultimately settled upon by Strieber corresponds most closely to that of an elderly priest: a white-haired slightly built man dressed plainly in dark clothes — shirt, jacket, and slacks — who was “joyous”^[89] and who called Strieber “child” (26, 31, 62, 67, 73, 74). All that was missing was the priestly collar.

Of course, in the dialogue Strieber attempted to make him more than that:

That's an even more clever answer—what's your name, anyway?

If I said Michael?

An archangel in a turtleneck?

Legion, then?

I think you're a perfectly ordinary person with an ordinary mother and an ordinary name.

I can imagine no greater honor than to be called human. (22–23)

Strieber attempts to make him into an angel, which the Master of the Key counters in a rather transparent way to manage Strieber's expectations. When the Master of the Key says that he can “imagine no greater honor than to be called human”, it establishes that whatever his name, the Master of the Key is an otherworldly champion of mankind. Strieber returns to this theme in *The Prophecy of the Key*, the final section of the 2001 Walker & Collier in which he writes:

I was at mass on the morning of November 19, 2000, when one of the readings leaped out at me. I grew physically cold, as I

realized what I was seeing.

I dropped the missal and stared ahead, barely hearing the mass that was now proceeding without one of its participants.

What I had read appeared to be a direct prophecy about this time, and about the Master of the Key. [...]

On that night, he had called himself ‘Michael.’ He had prophesied a terrible future, and told me enough about it to enable me to write a book of warning that was based in solid science. And here in the book of Daniel, was another version of that same warning. [...]

Here are the verses that so unsettled me:

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as was never seen since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time they people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. [...] —Daniel 12: 1-3

I was left with this thought: we do not really know how to describe these beings like Michael, through whom God shines. We call them angels, lords, princes, but how they may live from day to day, and what they mean to themselves in the spirit is not given to us to know. (103-104)

Of course, it rather beggars belief that after supposedly raising the possibility with the Master of the Key that he was an archangel, Strieber’s blood would run cold months later at the suggestion that there was an archangel named Michael who would stand up for the “children of thy people” as a champion of mankind. This appears to be Strieber in his usual storytelling mode convincing us of a dramatic confirmation of events which on closer scrutiny does not hold. Nevertheless, it is clear in what is effectively his afterword to the Walker & Collier that Strieber eventually circles around to the conclusion that the Master of the Key is basically an angel living alongside us “day to day”.

The effort to christianize the Master of the Key does not end there. In fact, there are arguably at least two ways that Strieber strongly associates the Master of the Key with Christ.

First, Strieber has emphasized the ‘authority’ with which the Master of the Key spoke a number of times. For example:

He was speaking from experience and certain knowledge. With authority! My God. ^[90]

I can't communicate the authority with which he spoke.^[91]

To me he spoke with the voice of authority [...] ^[92]

The guy spoke with what I describe as authority.^[93]

It is a frequent enough descriptor that it calls to mind what is said at the start of the first Gospel, Mark, about Jesus:

And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. [Mark 1:22]

The line is repeated in Matthew 7:29 and Luke 4:32. Of course, many might be said to speak with authority without calling to mind Jesus Christ. But the Master of the Key's "authority" becomes more interesting when viewed alongside one of the more inscrutable details about him: that he doesn't pay taxes.

I thought you were an angel.

You flatter me. I'm only a Canadian. But I don't pay taxes. (58)

The strange and completely out of place fact that he does not pay taxes gains a new aspect when one realizes that Jesus does not pay taxes either. From Matthew 17:24-27:

24 After they arrived in Capernaum, the men collecting the two drachmas tax approached Peter and said: "Does your teacher not pay the two drachmas tax?" 25 He said: "Yes." However, when he entered the house, Jesus spoke to him first and said: "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive duties or head tax? From their sons or from the strangers?" 26 When he said: "From the strangers," Jesus said to him: "Really, then, the sons are tax-free. 27 But that we do not cause them to stumble, go to the sea, cast a fishhook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth, you will find a silver coin. Take that and give it to them for me and you."^[94]

Jesus declares himself "tax-free" on account of the fact that he is among the "sons" (i.e. a son of God). Nevertheless, in order to be gracious and not to cause the tax collectors to "stumble", Jesus produces the

payment in such a way that it is not he who is paying it.

If it is true that the Master of the Key is being associated with Jesus in *The Key* as it appears, then it can be said that Strieber's conception of the Master of the Key figure seems to waver between archangel-champion of mankind and Jesus-like figure in order for Strieber to partake of the most holy vision possible. The tantalizing possibility that the Master of the Key could be all these things — dead man, risen man, man filled with ecstasy, man on a mission on lowly earth, an archangel, even Jesus himself in a sense — provides a real satisfaction. Indeed, as will be seen in a later section, precisely what the Master of the Key is does not matter: it is how he functions for Strieber that counts.

Nevertheless, there is no denying, especially with all the gospel references that he makes in *The Conversation*, that the Master of the Key is presented to the reader as a half-man, half-otherworldly being with a kind of divine wisdom. This is why it is all the more surprising when he makes a clear mistake.

Who were Mohammed and Buddha?

Exactly who history portrays them to have been. But to understand what happened to them, you must understand that your entire pantheon of deities is you. God is you. The gods are you. Angels and demons are you. So it was mankind who spoke to Mohammed in his cave. So also, to Buddha under the Bhodi Tree, and to Christ in the desert. Who do you think showed him the cities of the plain? Satan is man, just as God is man. Satan seeks, God waits. But you do not surrender. Not even Moslems. Although the great Sufis have, some of them, somewhat, surrendered to God. As long as you defy God by self-will, Satan finds you and captures you. (27-28)

The problem is that Jesus did not see the "cities of the plain". Here the Master of the Key conflates two very different biblical episodes. In Genesis 19, there is the story of Lot and his wife when Sodom and Gomorrah (two of the "cities of the plain") are destroyed. In Matthew 4:8, on the other hand, there is the temptation of Jesus by Satan during his forty days in the desert. In the latter, Satan takes Jesus to a high place and shows him the kingdoms of the world, offering them to him.

One would think it unlike an otherworldly champion or even archangel who can speak as God to make such a fallible, even Strieber-like mistake. Indeed, Strieber made the same mistake in an interview in 1997,

one year before his ‘true encounter’:

And these Visitors are hardly seductive. [...] So they don’t really fit the imagery of the demon. When Satan attempted to seduce Christ by offering him the cities of the plain, it was an alluring seduction, full of temptation. Not something horrifying.^[95]

Here again the Master of the Key’s words seem limited by the contents of Strieber’s mind. And to further compound the problems for Strieber in this area, the Master of the Key’s Christianity is like Strieber’s own in another respect: a certain equivocation when it comes to the historicity of Jesus.

The question of whether there was a historical Jesus is raised in *The Conversation* twice. But two different answers are given: one clearly affirmative, the other evasive.

What of Jesus? What of Buddha?

Those are two different, but intertwined, questions. First, you must understand that the teachings of Buddha had reached the community of Hellenized Jews in which Jesus lived. So they form a part of Christianity. He was a spiritual revolutionary who brought a message of mercy and compassion and the dignity of man to a world of unimaginable terror. The Roman rule was blind and brutal and unspeakably greedy. Ancient knowledge was being murdered by Roman ignorance and Roman power. This knowledge consisted of how to consciously form a radiant body so that you would not recur into the physical, so that you would be free. Christ was here to preserve this knowledge and pass it down. But even his deposit was corrupted by Roman politicians, who transformed his practice into a religion after he died.

There was no resurrection, then?

No, that’s just the point—there was. But you lost the understanding of it. The gospels describe what happened with great fidelity. He was seen. He did walk after his death. It was not his twin. (24-25)

In the above passage, Jesus is referred to quite matter-of-factly as a “spiritual revolutionary” described with “great fidelity” in the gospels. Even the reality of the resurrection is affirmed. Nevertheless, much later in *The Conversation*, near its end, the question is asked more explicitly

and a very different sort of answer is given:

Did Christ even exist?

The gospel exists. You can get a copy and hold it in your hands. That's all you need to know. But be careful. Along with its wisdom, the gospel contains many political statements. (61)

The answer reads as if expressly designed to sidestep the question in favor of the gospel and its written “wisdom”. It is difficult to reconcile this with material earlier in *The Conversation* where Jesus is spoken of as an actual historical figure. But here again, an equivocation by the Master of the Key when it comes to an actual Jesus reflects doubts Strieber seems to have about the history of Christianity in real life.

In a *Journal* entry from 2004,^[96] Strieber demonstrates he is aware of questions about the historicity of Jesus.

The imagery and ritual surrounding Christ is similar to that surrounding other savior deities, most notably Mithra. “He who will not eat of my body, nor drink of my blood so that he may be one with me and I with him, shall not be saved,” is an inscription from a Mithraic altar that predates the gospels by 90 years. The early Christian author Tertullian went so far as to claim that such inscriptions had been placed on these altars by Satan, who had gone back in time to do it in order to confuse Christians.

Indeed, the similarities between Mithraism and Christianity are so numerous that it cannot really be denied that the older cult influenced the more recent one. The Mithraic Holy Father wore a red cap, robe, and a special ring, and carried a shepherd's staff. All Mithraic priests were called “father,” and, despite Matthew 23:9, Christian priests adopted the same title. Mithra's bishops wore a mithra, or miter, as their badge of office. Christian bishops also adopted miters. The Mithraic mass involved the eating of a sunshaped bun embossed with the sword of Mithra, which was a cross. The Catholic communion wafer continues this Mithraic tradition, and the structure of the old Catholic Tridentine Mass closely mirrors the Mithraic mass.

So, are we to conclude from all this that Christianity is just another cult that does not reflect any real truth? Or that the Koran is simply a fiction created by a paranoid schizophrenic? Or the bible, as some reformed Jewish scholars contend, a novel?

Well, of course. All these things are quite correct. The story of Christ is not based on history as observed and agreed by many, but on the hearsay of just a few people, none of whom were witness to the actual events. And there is every evidence that the structure of Christian ritual is taken from other cults. So, why should we think it special? ^[97]

Strieber, of course, goes on to say:

So, if some time traveler came back with proof that Jesus had never existed, it wouldn't shake my faith at all. Nor does the corruption of Islam shake my faith in the word of God that sifts through the Koran like a sublime perfume.

What one sees here, interestingly, are two competing impulses in Strieber. On the one hand, the desire to be out in front and ahead of every intellectual argument is clearly in evidence here: if there are arguments why Jesus never existed, Strieber would be certain to try to get a handle on them. His intellectual vanity and desire to be truth-teller to the world require it. On the other hand, as the last excerpted paragraph shows, his indomitable religiosity also expresses itself in what amounts to a variation on the old apologetic argument that if there are errors in the Bible, for example, scribal errors in transmission, what remains is still the product of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, it is a reflection of Strieber's desire to reflect his entire thought in *The Conversation* that it bears the cracks in the intellectual edifice of his belief — while at the same time, of course, embodying those beliefs in an exemplar of human decency: the Master of the Key, who in his final imagined form fits the physical type of an elderly priest, who might also be an archangel, and who like Jesus also speaks with distinctive authority and does not pay taxes.

OTHER PROBLEMS

CERTAIN IDEAS in *The Conversation* that sound provocative are mentioned only in passing, creating the impression that the Master of the Key has information in excess of what can be said in the conversation, and so must be speaking from a position of real knowledge. But the intriguing quality of these elliptically-presented ideas evaporates when

it is discovered that, for example, they were floating around in the online paranormal milieu of the nineteen-nineties.

One such case is the Master of the Key's explanation for crop circles.

Do energetic beings appear in the physical world?

An example would be the much maligned crop circles. These are two dimensional portraits of these beings, self-created. They are trying to introduce themselves. (41)

The idea that crop circles were being created by plasmas was being explored by W.C. Levengood in the 1990s and was well known, even being reported on at various times by Strieber's associate, Linda Moulton Howe.^[98] Given that Strieber had been speculated for years prior that some plasmas might be manifestations of intelligent or conscious energy, the idea that crop circles might amount to "portraits" of these "beings" caused by the collisions with fields would come easily to Strieber.

The question then is whether the particular emphasis on "two-dimensional" had any basis in the milieu at around the time *The Key* was written. In fact, it did have such a basis. Certain websites presented the case that crop circles were two-dimensional representations of higher-dimensional objects, and attempted to show using geometry that this was the case.^[99]

One can also not help but notice that this geometrical perspective relates to the passage in *The Conversation* about object passing through a plane:

[...] Am I right?

You are, but that is a three-dimensional view, and thus limited by the limits of three-dimensional vision. Remember the analogy of how the two-dimensional being sees a solid object. As a ball passes through the flat plane on which such a being would be confined, it would not see the real shape, or even be able to conceive of it. By definition, a two-dimensional being cannot look up, for then it would see into the third dimension, which is impossible for it to do. What it would see, always looking straight ahead, would be a dot that would grow into a line, then slowly contract again into a dot and disappear. It would never understand the true nature of the ball, because its two-dimensional mind cannot contain the concept of a solid object. (50)

As previously noted, this thought-artifact likely came to Strieber from Ouspensky. But what is significant about the discussion in *The Conversation* about crop circles is the way Strieber incorporates speculations that are not even his own (crop circles caused by plasmas vs. caused by higher-dimensional objects), harmonizing them and making each the support for the other. When it is seen that the Master of the Key's account of crop circles is not really original or authoritative and that these ideas come from distinct sources, one realizes the text is allusively connecting these insights in a way to suggest a body of knowledge behind them which is not really there.

This allusive construction of networked ideas can be seen in another notion that at first appears provocative and “deeply, profoundly new”: the eucharist and its relation to prehistoric cannibalism.

How can we regain it? Is something like the Eucharist part of this science?

Christ gave the Eucharist to mankind. But the Eucharistic feast was enacted from time immemorial. It began when you still lived in the forest. When the strong died, you ate their flesh to gain their strength. (39)

Our belief in the ‘truth’ of this assertion is reinforced when in a very different context we read:

How did we misuse this power?

In those days, there were a few people on the earth with understanding greater than that of all your great scientists of today. But they guarded their knowledge ferociously. They were extremely secretive. The average man was little more than an animal, eating his brother for strength. So they lost everything, because you are a single being, and thus only as conscious as the least of you. (47)

This harkens back to what we read before the eucharist was even mentioned in the dialogue:

What will we do for this other world?

You will draw it toward ecstasy just as your mentors draw you toward ecstasy. Right now, there are brilliant creatures there looking at the sky and devouring the flesh of their own children,

just as you did. Unless you help them, they will not make their evolutionary leap in time, and will go extinct. (35-36)

The problem is that this idea of the eucharist stretching back into prehistory and involving cannibalism is a well-established idea. To give one example, Martin A. Larson in *The Great Osiris* as far back as 1960 wrote that:

the doctrine of the eucharist has its ultimate roots in the prehistoric cannibalism practiced almost universally by savages, for the Nilotics, as well as many others, believed that we become what we eat; the virtues and the powers of the one killed and eaten pass into the eater. [...]

One of the oldest of the Pyramid Texts is that of Unas, from the Sixth Dynasty, ca. 2500 B.C. This is of importance because it shows that at that time the original ideology of Egypt was still intermingled with the Osirian concepts. Although he is ultimately given high place in heaven by order of Osiris, Unas is represented as being at first an enemy of the gods and his ancestors, whom he hunts, lassoes, kills, cooks, and eats so that their powers become his own. The story of Unas is a relic from an age in which the eating of parents had been considered not only an efficacious but also a laudable ceremonial, and it emphasizes how difficult it must have been for the Osirian priests to stamp out the primordial cannibalism.

Although crude, savage, and grotesque to us, this sacerdotal cannibalism was, nevertheless, the core of a fearfully dynamic concept which still survives.^[100]

Strieber pushes the cannibalism farther back to the days of human origins in order to keep the time window open for his antediluvian civilization eventually destroyed for its misdeeds. Traces of his preoccupation with this Atlantean notion are visible in the question about 'is there a record' of this eucharist, invoking Edgar Cayce's Hall of Records said to date back to the antediluvian civilization.

How can we regain it? Is something like the Eucharist part of this science?

Christ gave the Eucharist to mankind. But the Eucharistic feast was enacted from time immemorial. It began when you still lived

in the forest. When the strong died, you ate their flesh to gain their strength.

Did it work?

Don't joke with me. It was pitiful.

Is there a record of the Eucharist before Christ?

There is.

What is it?

I'm not interested in answering. You will find the science of ascension in the dancing of the Sufis, the meditations of the Yogi, the chanting of the monastics. This science is lost as a science, but it can be regained. (39)

But on closer scrutiny, the question as to a "record" seems nonsensical: if the cannibalism under discussion dates back to mankind's origins à la the opening scenes of *2001: A Space Odyssey* there could not possibly be a "record". We get this sort of picture from the Master of the Key when he talks of the time we were still living "in the forest" eating the strong for their strength. We get it from him as well when we hear of intelligent life on another world we are meant to save currently "devouring the flesh of their own children". The Master of the Key seems to present two different pictures simultaneously: an early stage of man from perhaps a hundred thousand years before and an antediluvian civilization perhaps fifteen thousand years old. Thus the question as to a "record" of the eucharist only seems to make sense in an associative way connecting human origins and the "previous civilization" (14) without the connection existing anywhere as such.

One starts to understand why the Master of the Key would paint this confusing and seemingly contradictory picture when it is realized that Strieber was putting forward this exact picture in his book *The Secret School*:

What I expect to see are cavemen and mammoths and — wonder of them all — a saber-toothed tiger. But I do not see these things. Indeed, something very different appears — a whole, complete world that is in no way our modern world. I see it only for a moment, then it is gone. But the color, the complexity, the sense of life — it's all quite amazing.

I see cities, but they seem isolated and enclosed, much more so than at any time in our recorded history. Most of the people are outside cities and live primitive lives. Those inside, though, exist

in a state that even today would seem like magic.

This is not a good world. The oppressions of Rome are kind compared to what chains these people. Their knowledge may be greater than what we have now, but they have used their intelligence to enslave their own souls. This world is engaged in some sort of obsessive project, and I know what it is. They are trying to escape. They are trying to break the chains that bind them to the Earth.

I go closer, I enter myself as I was then — and I find that it is a very troubled self. I am afraid. We are all dreadfully afraid. We have deep mines, and in them are detectors that tell us what is happening in the center of the Earth. I know that Earth's core is crystalline iron, not molten as we think in 1995. (147-148)

Strieber's visionary insight that the "Earth's core is crystalline iron, not molten as we think in 1995" happened to coincide with a 1995 article in the *New York Times*: "The Core of the Earth May Be a Gigantic Crystal Made of Iron" by William J. Broad published April 4. In the *Times* article, Broad writes:

But new studies suggest otherwise. This mass of metal appears to have a texture or grain much as wood does. Going further, some experts say it may be a solid crystalline structure of gigantic proportions.

"My hypothesis is that it's like a diamond in the center of the earth, just one single crystal," Dr. Ronald E. Cohen, a geophysicist at the Carnegie Institution of Washington who is using supercomputers to model the core's structure, said in an interview.

[...]

The main way of studying this out-of-the-way region is with sensors that pick up faint vibrations in the ground, which allow scientists to map the paths and speeds of shock waves that radiate out from big earthquakes the way ripples cross a pond.

One should compare this to what Strieber says channeling his past life in the previous civilization:

We understand how even the slightest blow to the planet's surface, correctly delivered, can cause this crystal to begin vibrating, and when it vibrates it creates movements in the mantle

like waves in a storm. When struck, Earth behaves like a plastic.

We use these detectors to tell us things about the Earth that our present age no longer understands. (TSS 148)

In case the intellectual travesty here is not enough, it should be pointed out that in *The Conversation* the Master of the Key affirms Strieber's vision of himself having a past life in that previous civilization:

So what happened to the old world, as you call it—this civilization in which I'm not even sure I believe?

You lived in it—as, when you die, you will recall. It was destroyed and all of its works were undone and laid waste. Where there are now deserts, there were great cities. [...] (53)

So Strieber has a vision of himself and a past civilization that draws on a *New York Times* science news article. He passes off his vision as having prophetic dimensions by knowingly or unknowingly suppressing the fact he has gotten the information from the article. Then he has a conversation a few years later with an otherworldly visitor who presents the same vision of the previous civilization as fact while affirming that Strieber “lived in it”. It is perhaps worth noting that the theory of the single-crystal iron core has since been abandoned.^[101]

The Conversation is convincing as a literary creation, partly because its evocative and allusive assertions indirectly find their basis in other assertions, partly because the assertions circle tantalizing lacunae. But when under closer scrutiny the associations dissolve, or when Strieber's own speculations seem to be the real basis for those evocative assertions — any hope that the words of the Master of the Key describe an actual reality evaporates. Another example of this problem is the claim by the Master of the Key to the effect that ‘Mars was murdered’ (55).

There was an actual, physical battle?

There is a sacred science. It enables complete mastery of time and space. You had access to this science and used technology based on it. You went to war. This whole solar system bears scars from the battle, some of them terrible. You remember this, because you fought.

I don't remember a thing.

Your species bears a wound in its soul that makes you deny the reality of the past that is plainly visible all around you. Mars was

murdered by you. At that point, intervention occurred, as it will again when you destroy this planet, as will probably happen. This is the trigger for intervention, the destruction of a living world.

Who intervenes?

God acts.

That is to say, you.

Remember that God is holographic. Thus all act when God acts. You act.

We remember this as the angel with the fiery sword who drove us from the garden?

The planet was seized with upheaval, its climate revised. You fought each other like starving rats, in the end. Then, when you had lost everything, your beautiful world was turned under by the hoe of forgetfulness. (55-56)

In the Master of the Key's account, the "previous civilization" (14) was destroyed because it went to war with God. The previous civilization at least in some measure coincided with what still exists of ancient Egypt:

What is prayer?

A lost science of communication. This planet was once covered by a gigantic instrument of communication and ascension. Tones were important to inducing a correct flow of energy in the bodies of creatures. The ringing of the Egyptian obelisks set the correct frequency. Using this instrument, human beings could project themselves into higher worlds—what you call interstellar space, but also higher space. All of the ruins you see and consider as entirely separate from one another were actually part of the single great machine. This was a subtle machine. It did things far more sublime than any of your current machines. It was a machinery of God, this machine. It was very intelligent, infused with many souls. It could be addressed—programmed, if you will—with carefully patterned groups of words. These formulae became ritualized among the ignorant as prayers and magical formulae, for they assumed that the machine must be the god of those who addressed it, and they tried to do the same, in hope that it would grant them some benefit. However, the language of the machine was the language of nature, for the machine was not separate from nature. (62-63)

But if the previous civilization ended, for example, within the past twenty thousand years, which one might suppose given that the ruins we “see and consider entirely separate from one another” still exist — when precisely was Mars murdered? Scientists today believe that Mars has been a wasteland for billions of years.^[102] How then could a past human civilization that died with the last ice age destroy Mars a few billion years in the past? *The Conversation* says: “There is a sacred science. It enables complete mastery of time and space” (55). Did the previous world’s civilization reach back in time?

It is a question for which the already cryptic text has no clear answer. Luckily, there is an answer if one looks elsewhere in Strieber’s work:

All the years I had with the visitors have fairly well convinced me that they actually LIVE across time and outside of time. I think that they arrived here, in a synchronous present, about sixty years ago. My guess is that they found a very different earth from the one we know.

The instant they arrived, they spread across our entire timeline, probably creating the entire array of life on earth, even going back into the past to actually set up this solar system as a life-sustaining machine. If Jupiter wasn’t out there absorbing blows like the recent Shoemaker-Levy comet, the inner solar system would be a ravaged mess, and if the moon wasn’t rotating at just the right point, and the earth just the right distance from the sun, there would be no life here. Statistically, it’s really all but impossible that this particular set of circumstances would occur by accident. So, let’s assume that it didn’t.

What I suspect that the visitors found here was a planet something like Mars, without a moon. They saw what Jupiter was doing and realized that with the fairly minimal effort -- for them -- of moving back a few billion years and setting up the moon, they could re-create the earth moon system as a life-making machine.

So our entire half a billion year history of evolutionary change is, in their objective time, only a few decades old! But for us, it’s all taken the millions of years that we see in the fossil record!

This *Journal* dates from July 19, 2006,^[103] and reflects the very Ouspenskian thinking that “outside of time” one can view past, present, and future as one completed object. In the *Journal*, the ‘visitors’ appear

in the nineteen-forties, fully in keeping with the UFO lore. But given their complete mastery of time and space, they proceeded to move both forward and backward in time and human history, even setting up the “life-sustaining machine” that is the solar system in order to give rise to human life.

The same logic no doubt explains how according to the Master of the Key, a previous human civilization which had “complete mastery of time and space” could destroy Mars a few billion years in the past. In both cases, there is a kind of celestial engineering: when it comes to Strieber’s speculation about the visitors, it was a constructive one inasmuch as they created the earth. When it comes to the Master of the Key’s pronouncement that ‘Mars was murdered’ by fallen human beings in a previous civilization who went back in time to destroy their enemy, the celestial engineering was clearly negative.

One can only conclude on seeing two speculative scenarios so mirroring each other that when it comes to the Master of the Key and Strieber, the former clearly is the latter — and not for the science-fictional reason offered up by Strieber that the Master of the Key might be Strieber from the future.^[104] The Master of the Key is an imaginary figure, a device allowing Strieber to enter into a self-dialogue. Is it any wonder then given the profound confusion that is the very basis of this book that Strieber himself cannot tell what parts he wrote?

PART FIVE

DATING THE TARCHER

IT HAS BEEN SHOWN that when reading aloud from his own book, a book altered by ‘sinister forces’, Strieber was unable to notice changes had been made, and that he was able to give elaborate and convincing interpretations of ‘censored’ passages without any problem.

It has also been shown that with his charge of censorship, Strieber was unable to give a single consistent account of how the alteration was done, suggesting implausibly at various times that the changes were done to a file after it had been sent to the printer, or that changes were made by hand to proof sheets in his possession.

Finally, it has been shown that the ‘new vision’ presented by the

Master of the Key actually originates with Whitley Strieber, and consists of the latter's ideas to the point that the Master of the Key repeats verbatim assertions made by Strieber in various books and interviews, suggesting an author who if he is not lying is profoundly confused.

Given the problems with Strieber at every stage concerning *The Key*—indeed, it is impossible to imagine an account more riddled with problems from start to finish—one can be forgiven for wanting to set aside everything Strieber has said about the composition of the Tarcher ΔK to focus instead on the internal evidence of the texts.

The first question that should be asked: is there any evidence that any Tarcher ΔK existed prior to 2011? After all, Strieber could have made all the changes that appear in the Tarcher prior to that book's publication.

In fact, there is evidence that Tarcher ΔK existed prior to the Tarcher's 2011 publication.

1. In a *Journal* entry called "Easter, 2002" dated Saturday, March 30, 2002,^[1] Strieber quotes from *The Conversation* using Tarcher ΔK text:

The moment that God tells Abraham not to kill Isaac is a record of one of the most sacred of all human moments, for it sets the stage for the next age.

The text in the Walker & Collier is this:

The story of God telling Abraham not to kill Isaac is a record of one of the most sacred of all human moments, for it sets the stage for the next age (42-43)

2. In an *unknowncountry.com* news story, which is nothing more than a paragraph of news and a lengthy quotation from *The Key*, called "You May Own a Conscious Computer Someday" and dated Monday, December 8, 2008,^[2] the Tarcher ΔK is as follows:

It would use indirect means. It might foment the illusion that an elusive alien presence was here, for example, to interject its ideas into society.

The text in the Walker & Collier is this:

It would use indirect means. It might spread the illusion that

an elusive alien presence was here, for example, to interject its ideas into society.

3. Finally, in a stroke of irony, the Walker & Collier edition of *The Key* itself quotes from the Tarcher. On page 30 of *The Conversation* in the 2001 Walker & Collier it reads:

Man will persist, waiting until and if the earth spins elemental bodies once again that fit all the attachments of your energetic bodies. If it does not, then you wait forever. You remain incomplete.

But in the section called *The Prophecy of the Key* where Strieber gives interpretations of a number of passages, Strieber quotes this from the dialogue in place of the answer above:

We wait until and if the earth spins elemental bodies once again that fit all the attachments of our energetic bodies. If it does not, then we wait forever. We remain incomplete. (97)

This text would appear in the Tarcher version of *The Conversation* as ΔK some ten years later.

Given that at least some of the Tarcher ΔK existed well before 2011, and that Strieber himself was quoting a Tarcher ΔK in the Walker & Collier, does this not show that Strieber's censorship claim was valid? Unfortunately, there are some basic problems with the claim even beyond the fact there was no coherent account of how it was done.

The first and primary reason why Strieber concluded that his text had been censored, and why he went public with this conviction, was that he had sent to Tarcher his original Microsoft Word manuscript with its last modified date of November 16, 2000. According to Strieber, his text had not been altered since that time and since the 2011 Tarcher matched his old manuscript file, any differences appearing in the Walker & Collier had to come from alteration.

But this is from the original 2001 introduction to *The Key*, the section called *The Master of the Key*:

It is now December of 2000, and I have just completed the most difficult writing struggle of my life. At first, the memories came fast and easy. Soon, there were twenty pages, then thirty. But

then I began to worry. (7)

It rather puts to bed the notion that Strieber had finished working on *The Key* on November 16, 2000. Of course, the November date might refer to a last modified date of a file containing only *The Conversation*. Strieber might have created a different Microsoft Word file for each section of the book or he might have written the sections surrounding *The Conversation* in PageMaker. Or he might have written all the book's sections in the same Microsoft Word document, and added the month of December during the book's proofing process revisions. Any number of possibilities exist.

And this is the problem. The differences between the two texts can be accounted for in a variety of ways — all banal. Nearly all of the differences can be seen as simple editorial decisions. Take, for example, the Tarcher ΔK quoted in Strieber's 2002 *Journal* entry:

The moment that God tells Abraham not to kill Isaac is a record of one of the most sacred of all human moments, for it sets the stage for the next age.

Anyone with an eye for editing would immediately see the problem with this sentence: a "moment" is said to be a "record" of a moment. The word "moment" is used twice and creates a clanging repetition; moreover, logically speaking, a moment is not a record. So one can easily see why the Walker & Collier revised the awkward sentence into this better prose:

The story of God telling Abraham not to kill Isaac is a record of one of the most sacred of all human moments, for it sets the stage for the next age (42-43)

Now a "story" is said to be a "record" of a moment. This is an obvious improvement, and clearly, the Walker & Collier in this case represents a revision of the Tarcher.

The same problem can be seen again in the Tarcher:

Isn't this going to heaven?

There is an element of ecstasy, but it is not complete. When another elemental forms that fits the pattern of that particular fragment [...]

In this passage, there is a bad repetition of the word “element”. There is an “element” of ecstasy, but then there is “another elemental”, and it is not clear what the free-floating adjective “elemental” is meant to modify. The word has been left out.

Here is the Walker & Collier version of the same exchange:

Isn't this going to heaven?

There is some ecstasy, but it is not complete. When another elemental body forms that fits the pattern of that particular fragment [...] (17)

The distracting repetition is removed, and the missing word “body” has been supplied. Again, the Walker & Collier text clearly reflects an improvement over the Tarcher.

We see the same situation again with the Tarcher in this example:

We learn from our mistakes. But those who give themselves to evil suffer. Make no mistake. They can become so heavy that they sink into the earth. Just as the energetic body can enjoy extraordinary pleasure, it can suffer excruciating pain. You have in your body a few million nerves. But in your energetic body, every tiny bit of being can experience the totality of ecstasy or agony.

As shown previously, ‘make no mistake’ is an expression of emphasis Strieber relies on. But in this exchange, which begins with “we learn from our mistakes”, it creates a distracting repetition, even a contradiction. So the Walker & Collier removes it:

We learn from our mistakes. But those who give themselves to evil suffer. They can become so heavy that they sink into the earth. Just as the energetic body can enjoy extraordinary pleasure, it can suffer excruciating pain. You have in your body a few million nerves. But in your energetic body, every tiny bit of being can experience the totality of ecstasy or agony. (48-49)

These are a few of the differences that reflect examples of editing done for the Walker & Collier but not the 2011 Tarcher. At a minimum, they demonstrate that there was some sort of proofing process for the text of the original manuscript after it was created in Microsoft Word.

There are also typographical mistakes corrected in the Walker &

Collier that are not corrected in the Tarcher:

1. On page 21 of the Walker & Collier, a phrase reads “such a way”, but in the Tarcher “such away”.

2. On page 30 of the Walker & Collier, a phrase “need to return to” appears in the Tarcher as “need return to”.

But are there any cases where the Tarcher demonstrates editorial improvement over the Walker & Collier?

When it comes to typographical mistakes, the Tarcher corrects some typos in the Walker & Collier: on page 32 of the latter, the phrase “seemed imply” was corrected for the Tarcher to “seemed to imply”. On page 33 of the Walker & Collier, “self will” becomes “self-will” in the Tarcher. On page 66 of the Walker & Collier, “time, But” is corrected to “time. But”.

But when it comes to editorial changes at the level of wording, there are no Tarcher ΔK that *unequivocally* represent improvements on the Walker & Collier of the sort seen above. There are some differences that seem ambiguous and that could only arguably reflect attempts to improve the text. For example, the following is from the Walker & Collier:

I’m not interested in answering. You will find the science of ascension in the dancing of the Sufis, the meditations of the Yogi, the chanting of the monastics. This science is lost as a science, but it can be regained. (39)

In the Tarcher, instead of “chanting of the monastics”, the phrase used is: “prayer of the Christian monastics”. The Tarcher is more specific about what kind of “monastics” is being mentioned, and so arguably is an improvement, though something already readily identifiable with Christian monks, namely “chanting”, is lost.

Another case: as quoted in the December 8, 2008, news story, one Tarcher ΔK is:

It would use indirect means. It might foment the illusion that an elusive alien presence was here, for example, to interject its ideas into society.

The Walker & Collier uses the word “spread” instead of “foment”. One might here opt for “foment” as a more sophisticated use of language, and in its sense of ‘to foster’, the word “foment” might well be more correct. At the same time, “foment” is a word that one finds

exclusively in written English and not in conversation. Strieber, at pains to convince readers that this was the transcription of an actual conversation, might have decided to replace “foment” with “spread” as more natural-sounding. Again, the difference is at best equivocal. There are no cases among the smaller Tarcher ΔK where the Tarcher represents an obvious editorial improvement on the Walker & Collier text as we saw earlier in reverse.

Even without a comprehensive survey of all the differences, it can be seen that contrary to Strieber’s assertion, some sort of proofing process took place that involved purely editorial changes being made to his original text back in 2000. If there was a Microsoft Word file dated November 16, 2000, that file did not represent the final stage of the composition process.

And so, are differences between the texts not to be expected? In Strieber’s own telling of events, the original Microsoft Word manuscript was sent to Tarcher. That file, according to Strieber, contained all the Tarcher ΔK . Wherever the text unique to the Walker & Collier came from, if Strieber is at all accurate about his manuscript file, none of the Walker & Collier ΔK would appear in the 2011 Tarcher unless also made in the Tarcher’s proofing process. In other words, if Strieber made a correction during the Walker & Collier’s proofing process, and then ten years later made the same correction independently in the Tarcher’s proofing process, then it would appear in the Tarcher and only for that reason.

Without being able to see the original Microsoft Word manuscript file, there is no telling how extensive, of course, the Tarcher proofing process was. There might have been many changes to the original text or there might have been very few. A number of differences in the Walker & Collier that look like editorial improvements made during its own proofing process do not show up in the Tarcher, suggesting the proofing process for the Walker & Collier was more extensive.

What of the more important differences? After all, in claiming censorship Strieber pointed to several areas of difference between the texts that were substantial. In some cases, entire paragraphs from the Tarcher were missing in the Walker & Collier.

In light of the foregoing in this paper, it does not seem strictly necessary to perform a forensic textual analysis to evaluate Strieber’s censorship claim. *The Key* is already based on a profound confusion between Strieber and a fantasy figure, and many of the details presented by Strieber in an effort to maintain that fantasy are either not possible or contradicted by other details. For instance, Strieber’s work on *The*

Key could not have been completed on November 16, 2000, if he was still writing in December. Strieber's claim that the text of the Word file was 'converted' to PageMaker with no changes being done does not survive scrutiny in light of all the editorial changes visibly present in it compared to the Tarcher. Strieber's description of his writing and editing process seems as confused as everything else surrounding *The Key*.

The basic question concerning the Tarcher ΔK is whether they represent changes made by Strieber specially for 2011 Tarcher or whether they date from the time of Strieber's first finished manuscript.

Consistent with Strieber's assertion that he sent Tarcher his Microsoft Word file dated November 2000, it appears that the latter is the case. One of the larger areas of disagreement between the Tarcher and the Walker & Collier has to do with 'mind control'. The subject-matter encompasses not only the means by which human affairs are controlled from a higher level, but also the nature of Whitley Strieber's implant.

From the Walker & Collier:

Another world is in control of this one?

Other worlds participate, both elemental and energetic.

[...]

How do they control this world?

Very generally.

General fields of control?

Directional suggestion.

Telepathy?

Extremely sensitive circuits can pick up and decode thought. Microwaves can be used to project thought into the brain. But the fields of which I speak are much more general. They create tendencies. The desire is to preserve the maximum amount of freedom in the maximum number of individuals.

Have any people from earth ever gone to other worlds?

A whole world of human beings has been evolved artificially off the planet, and they come and go freely.

What are you talking about?

Human beings are being born and raised off the earth. You can find their habitations if you look. They live in this solar system.

My God. How many?

Thousands.

What do they do here?

They help to enforce mankind's blindness by preventing sci-

ence from exploring the key mysteries of the past and discovering a practical means of expanding into the universe. (36–37)

From the Tarcher:

Another world is in control of this one?

Yes.

[...]

How do they control this world?

By planning, and they use mind control.

Am I under mind control?

The opposite. The technological intervention that has occurred in your case has been done to make certain that general fields of control will not affect you.

General fields of control?

Directional suggestion that is applied to all who are enhanced electrically. This is the means of control of military and government.

Telepathy?

Radio frequencies. Extremely sensitive circuits can pick up and decode thought. Microwaves can be used to project thought into the brain. But the fields of which I speak are much more general. They create tendencies. The desire is to preserve the maximum amount of freedom in the maximum number of individuals.

Have any people from earth ever gone to other worlds?

A whole world of human beings has been evolved artificially off the planet, and they come and go freely.

What are you talking about?

Human beings are being born and raised off the earth. You can find their habitations if you look. They live in this solar system.

My God. How many?

Thousands.

What do they do here?

They enforce mankind's blindness by preventing science from exploring the key mysteries of the past and discovering a practical means of expanding into the universe, and they maintain the official secrecy that keeps the question of whether or not aliens are here from being answered.

The Tarcher uses the term “mind control” whereas the Walker &

Collier does not. The Tarcher alleges that human populations are managed through the direct control of “military and government” personnel who have been “enhanced electrically”. The Walker & Collier seems to suggest by contrast that “directional suggestion” is applied to the human population as a whole. Both versions suggest in a way consistent with the UFO lore and Strieber’s own speculations that genetically human beings “evolved artificially off planet” are on earth, namely the so-called Blondes. But the Tarcher makes it clear it is invoking the tales of Blondes walking around the Pentagon by citing “official secrecy” as one of their tasks, whereas in the Walker & Collier it is less clear. At the same time, even though the Tarcher says that “mind control” is reserved for those in the military and in government, Whitley Strieber is nonetheless protected from this mind control courtesy of the “technological intervention” that occurred in his case.

Comparing these two versions is useful because it highlights the fact that at stake in these texts is less what an independent Master of the Key said, but Strieber’s own conception. The reason is that both versions demonstrate some level of confusion about what they are trying to say. It is not that one is clear and the other altered. Rather, both are somewhat convoluted and therefore reflect Strieber wrestling with how control of the human world is achieved. In the Walker & Collier, “[o]ther worlds participate” which is fully consistent with:

You exist on many levels, the living in their levels and the dead in their levels. Man is governed from the radiant level. [...]
Man is a child. Children govern children with the wisdom of children. (35)

The control of the human world is a function of a broader natural order of which human beings are mostly unaware. The Walker & Collier’s human beings from “off the planet” are more vague and presented as if indirectly helping mankind to evolve by adding challenges to “make you strong” (37). Whereas the Tarcher, on the other hand, has a sharper view: less a function of a natural order of things than the direct application of “mind control” through technology, members of the “military and government” are controlled, and this control is further aided by human beings from off-world who “come and go freely”. But somewhat nonsensically, Strieber — who does not belong to the government or the military — has been protected from this form of mind control to which he is not subject.

It is pointless to evaluate which version has more merit. Despite what Strieber may say, one is neither more nor less correct than the other since each represents a version of Strieber working through the problems with which he presented himself using the data he thinks is legitimate. However, it is possible to arrive at a date for the Tarcher ΔK using this passage.

The Tarcher curiously seems to refer to those under mind control against their will as having been “enhanced electrically”. The language is dubious from an editor’s point of view as, if anything, such people would be “enhanced electronically” and not “electrically”.

Leaving that aside, the Tarcher ΔK language resonates with a passage from the *Fragmentary Inclusions*. The word “enhance” appears only once in *The Conversation*: in the Tarcher ΔK . But once in the *Inclusions*:

Intelligent species are grains of gold in an ocean of sand. You are as intelligent as nature can make you, but your brain is still filled with potential. It is a resource available to be used. To do that, you need to understand how the brain works. In addition to creating machine intelligence in the image of your own mind, you need to enhance your native intelligence tenfold, a hundredfold. To accomplish this, you need help. Your intelligent machines will be your partners. Natural evolution has ended for you. Now you must evolve yourselves.

Much of the *Fragmentary Inclusions* seems a disordered paraphrase of statements already in *The Conversation*. But this discussion of ‘enhancing’ our own intelligence is not a part of *The Conversation* with its prescriptions for creating machine intelligence in order to predict otherwise unpredictable environmental change.

One could be excused for thinking that for representing a step beyond the mere creation of artificial intelligence, this passage and therefore the rest of the *Fragmentary Inclusions* come from Strieber in 2010/2011 trying to keep his Master of the Key up to date. Indeed, Strieber’s 2011 novel *Hybrids* seems to reflect this more cutting-edge transhumanist view.

Nevertheless, in *The Coming Global Superstorm*, written just before *The Key*, Strieber dances between each conception:

As we come more and more to understand the mechanics of thought, we are also reaching toward the seat of the soul itself,

on the point of discovering the all-important difference between intelligence and consciousness and, at the same time, striving to be within just a few tantalizing years of building an intelligent machine.

When we do this, the melding of man and machine will become so intricate that where the human personality ends and the machine personality begins will be a diminishing shadow line.

In response to the problems we face right now, we are going to find ways to generate and apply ever greater intelligence. Just as the development of more and more powerful engines defined the twentieth century, the development of ever more powerful minds will define the twenty-first. (ch 22)

Strieber was clearly thinking along these lines in 1999, and so the Tarcher ΔK could well have been from 2000 when Strieber was writing *The Key*. Indeed, one can see now why the Tarcher passage is confused. Not only is Strieber trying to excuse himself from accusations of mind control with his self-serving answer from the Master of the Key, he is also entertaining the idea that his implant has “enhanced” him, as reflected by later statements that he was putting his implant to use and traveling to other worlds with it.^[3]

Provided that Strieber did not add to the *Fragmentary Inclusions* for the 2011 Tarcher, there are other reasons to think that the material dates to 2000. Among the *Inclusions* is this from the Master of the Key:

Understand your past and what you have lost so that you are no longer surprised and destroyed by the cycle that has your planet in its grip. Your interest in the past, instilled in you from boyhood, should enable you to crack the code of *Hamlet's Mill* and impart the message that it contains. Why are you so slow? Time is running out.

Of course, the very self-oriented and self-serving element here that Strieber’s “interest in the past” was “instilled in [him] from boyhood” is strongly suspect. But the Master of the Key says that this interest and presumably unique historical understanding of Strieber’s is what should enable him to “crack the code of *Hamlet's Mill*”.

As noted in a previous section, this emphasis on the book *Hamlet's Mill* underlines the interest of otherworldly entities in everything Whitley Strieber does. But it also relates specifically to a period of time in

which this book was on Strieber's mind. He discusses it in his 1997 book *The Secret School*. But more importantly, he spends a significant part of his 2000 book *The Coming Global Superstorm* 'cracking the code'. While *The Key* declares the constellations of the Zodiac "arbitrary inventions" (56), in *The Coming Global Superstorm*, Strieber deciphers the symbolic meaning of each of the Zodiacal signs, explaining how they relate to each historical epoch.

It seems unlikely that in 2010 Strieber would be thinking about *Hamlet's Mill*, especially since the 'code' idea was already forgotten by the time of the Walker & Collier. The section *Fragmentary Inclusions*, despite the fact it only appears for the first time with the 2011 Tarcher, thus seems to date comparatively early as it closely matches material in *The Coming Global Superstorm*. Because some of the Tarcher ΔK seem to resonate with the *Fragmentary Inclusions*,^[4] if all of the *Fragmentary Inclusions* section was written at once, and if all of the Tarcher ΔK were written together — and these are only suppositions — then the Tarcher ΔK likely reflect an early stage in Strieber's composition process before the proofing process that ultimately produced the Walker & Collier.

THE COMPOSITION OF *THE KEY*

THE WRITING of *The Key* was an unusual affair. Starting with a page of notes, Strieber spent the latter part of 2000 laboriously piecing together a conversation that never took place. In a supreme act of remembering-by-imagining, Strieber sifted and re-sifted the precious ideas he was convinced he had only encountered for the first time in Toronto, ideas which it has been shown really came from Strieber himself.

The composition of *The Key* was something of an ordeal. Writing in October 2000 on his website's message board:

I've been working ever since on a book about this conversation. [...] (It'll be out when I finish it. Don't ask, it's terribly hard. I black out some times working on it.)^[5]

I am having trouble transcribing a conversation that I had in June of 1998 in a hotel in Toronto with the most extraordinary person I've ever met, at least to talk to. I took some notes, then spent the better part of the next two years jotting down bits and pieces of the conversation as I remembered them. Then came

time to put it all in order, and sometimes the ideas or something would affect me and I would blank out or have missing time while working. I would work and work, then fifteen or twenty minutes would be gone and I would be back where I started. It was the damndest thing.^[6]

Two things have made it hard: first, I am terrified of getting something wrong. At first, I was more concerned that maybe the event didn't happen at all. I had no proof. But later, when I began to get some of the ideas down, my second concern arose. It was obvious that much of this material was totally new and original, and on the face of it, just breathtaking. I ceased to feel that anyone would think I had dreamed it up myself. It's too new, a lot of it, too original. So then my problem became: what if I am adding my own imagination to this? What if I'm messing it up?

This has turned into the most challenging writing experience I have ever had. And I don't think that the document that is produced will be longer than a hundred pages! It amounts to a completely new view of man and God, though, this hundred pages.^[7]

Strieber was engaged in a complex psychological exercise. Remembering-by-imagining the 'true encounter' involved such exertion that he would "blank out or have missing time". He was after all organizing his own wealth of ideas at the same time that he was suppressing any memory of having said these things before.

Careful to get the Master of the Key's 'words' exactly right, Strieber subjected the text to a standard rigorous proofing process. From Strieber's descriptions of proofsheets and bluesheets, it is likely that multiple rounds of proofing were performed in November and December, with each round implemented into the PageMaker file, then new proof pages made. The process was not perfect. But satisfied in the end with the attention given to his in-house effort, Strieber brought his self-published book out at the start of January 2001.

Ten years later in 2010, Strieber managed to find a mainstream publisher, and so dusted off *The Key*. According to the best recollection of Strieber's editor at Tarcher, Mitch Horowitz, Strieber first sent a PDF of *The Key*.^[8] This would have been made from the PageMaker and included the book's final proof stages. But because PDFs are not convenient to work with, Tarcher requested the Microsoft Word file.

Strieber, forgetting that all the proofing had been done to the PageMaker, sent the Microsoft Word file which was only the first completed version. Tarcher only lightly edited the material, changing spelling and fixing a few typos, perhaps because it had already been ‘published’, perhaps because of assurances from Strieber that it reflected his final version and/or already had been proofed.

When discovery of the differences took place, because of the amount of psychological denial surrounding the book and its circumstances, Strieber had no choice but to panic as acknowledging that both versions with their many differences had come from him might have cast doubt on the ‘true encounter’ itself. In order to preserve that fantasy, and in line with his own feelings of misfortune at the trying situation, Strieber decided that his book had been censored by sinister forces; in other words, what was happening was more victimization at the hands of other people.

Had it not been for a basic misunderstanding with digital files and Strieber’s own forgetfulness, the extent to which *The Key* was an imagined creation might not be as clear today. Had Tarcher gone ahead and extracted the text from PDF, or had Strieber remembered what the original proofing of his text involved, there would have been no competing editions leading his own overreaction at the appearance of different versions of his text. Ultimately, it was this overreaction that drew attention to the finer details of the text and the reality that the Master of the Key’s ‘new vision’ was Strieber’s own.

WHAT IS **THE KEY**?

IF WE SET ASIDE the idea of *The Key* as a single published account of a ‘true encounter’, and instead take everything ever said about the encounter including early statements (pre-composition), both versions of *The Conversation* (Walker & Collier, Tarcher), the *Fragmentary Inclusions* (Tarcher), various interviews and so on, and call that corpus *The Key*, then what is *The Key*? What is its overall purpose? How does it function? What does it seek to accomplish?

1. *The Key* is a great, sweeping synthesis of a variety of ideas, a “view of man and God”^[9] that is very much like a Grand Unified Theory of the Paranormal.
2. As we have seen, entirely too many of these ideas came from influences on Strieber or were already ideas of Strieber’s own. From

themes (e.g. claiming the supernatural for science) down to specific terminology (e.g. ecstasy, conscious energy), *The Conversation* clearly represents Strieber's own synthesis. We can further say it is an *unconscious* synthesis: many elements are lifted verbatim from other sources and given a different sense as if a deep scouring of the unconscious mind had taken place.

3. *The Conversation* was a literary and artistic creation, a work of deep creativity: the final product was something very unlike and perhaps better — more focused, more complex, more sophisticated — than Strieber's usual treatment of the same themes and concepts. Using the fictional device of an external event — the 'true encounter' — he was better able to focus. Strieber imagined what the Master of the Key said under the guise of 'remembering'.

4. The Master of the Key figure and the external event of the encounter not only allowed Strieber to organize his thinking and synthesize perhaps a lifetime of experience. The Master of the Key figure also had a psychological purpose: it vindicated Strieber on three levels:

a) the sheer fact of the encounter: Strieber is chosen and not someone else. It raises the question: why? It is a question that Strieber, affecting humility, dodges. But the scenario naturally functions first and foremost to raise this question.

b) in the particulars. Because of much of what is said by this otherworldly visitor is what Strieber has warned about, speculated about, and asserted, Strieber as a thinker is vindicated, as are his experiences since Strieber himself and the positions he takes are the outcome of those experiences.

c) in the self-affirming, even self-serving features of the text. The Master of the Key, and tacitly, the higher levels, God — are interested in what Strieber is reading: *Forbidden Archaeology*, *Hamlet's Mill*, and Meister Eckhart as a child. The fate of Whitley Strieber's soul after death is of special importance ("[t]his is why we have been so insistent that you meditate. Otherwise, we will lose you when you die and we don't want that", 17). Strieber is recipient of messages of world-historical importance which he is meant to transmit: one system in three ("this has been hidden from you", 27); the meaning of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge ("this is the first time the true story of the taking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge has been said since you left the garden", 55); and the definition of God as what is missing in us ("[t]his is the first time this message is given", 59). Likewise an interest in history was "instilled" in Strieber from boyhood so that he might "crack the code of

Hamlet's Mill" and "impart the message" of its solution. Strieber's life and experiences are important: white liquid containing the structures of his life was given to him to drink; he was told the date of his death; and he was called by a childhood name no stranger should know. Strieber even has an implant, uniquely to *protect* him from mind control.

The Key thus functions as a healing salve to a life beset with conflicts such as Strieber has. For one, he is rejected by intellectual culture; the philosophical-spiritual system that *The Key* presents is a sophisticated and complex intellectual construct. Two, his experiences are rejected as unreal; *The Conversation* organizes and explicates those experiences with the statements by the Master of the Key confirming them at the same time as drawing upon them for their formulation. Three, at the deepest level, the fantasy of self is fully explored, including the enlistment of a divine agency which not only confers broad purpose on a life, but insulates one from charges of mind control and shows an interest in that life's tender and intimate moments ("childhood games with Mike", 17).

The psychological dimension to the imaginary meeting with the Master of the Key is present in everything Strieber has ever said about the encounter. In trying to explain who the Master of the Key was, Strieber offered a variety of possible solutions that worked as moments of storytelling, but made no sense as reasonable speculations. Everything from the Knights Templar and the Micmac Indians to a drummer in a lesser-known Texas orchestra was raised — and these, of course, only after deciding that the Master of the Key was not a smallish, child-like alien that the children had seen lurking in the woods. On scrutiny, these speculations seem not only weak, but spectacularly weak. Given that *The Conversation* already presents a reasonably clear picture of who the Master of the Key 'was', as shown, one has to wonder why the speculations exist at all other than to surround the Master of the Key with an artificial sense of mystery — and to add a layer of distance between Strieber and any awareness of who he 'was'.

Similarly, the slipperiness of Strieber's various attempts to defend himself raises doubts. Of course, with that slipperiness came conviction and confusion, showing that the Master of the Key encounter is not just something of which he has tried to convince the public, but also himself. But we see in the shifting accounts of the censorship scenario, for example, Strieber systematically eliminate every possible site at which alteration of the manuscript could have been done, but then still maintain it had been done. Likewise, Strieber could admit to a variety of "hyperdimensional" aspects to an encounter that may have lasted as

little as fifteen minutes, but simultaneously insist it was an ordinary encounter that produced a two-hour conversation, whether it was with a kindly humane elderly man or a short childlike creature with “sharp” features and a military-style outfit.

The fundamental question is: would Strieber dream up a book filled with important truths in order to vindicate himself intellectually and buoy himself emotionally? It so happens that Strieber has dreamt of other books full of important truths.

In a *Journal* dated October 5, 2012, Strieber detailed an agonizing bout of back pain in which Strieber was incapacitated for several days. The episode included a hospital visit, an MRI scan, and a home visit by a “healer” named Phil, of whom Strieber wrote:

Phil is worth a whole journal entry of his own. More. Today he took me very, very deep in a healing that is going to have a powerful place in my life and remembrance, no matter if it helps my back or not.^[10]

Underneath the otherwise mundane entry, Strieber wrote in the comments section:

The healing session was a big deal. Last night, I started processing the material. At first, when I came back, I had been so far that I was shocked to find myself in my body. Phil said he thought I'd been OBE. But I had little memory, except that I felt powerful emotion. I was glad to have been wherever I had gone, and glad also to be back with my family and my life here. Glad is not really the right word. It was overwhelming. Later in the evening, I kept bursting into tears, just from the sheer power of the emotions. In the night, I awoke with the most astonishing realization. I am sure you all recall Betty Andreasson Luca's story. In one of her recalls, she mentions being given a small book by the beings who were coming to her. She put on a closet shelf. The book later disappeared. Now, here is what is so incredible: During the OBE yesterday, I read that book. I have not thought about it in years. If you had asked me yesterday, I would have said that I had a vague memory of it. Now, suddenly, I had it and I understood it. It was not long, just a few pages. But it contains core truth. Structural truth. I am going to let it rest for a little while, then I am going to publish it as a journal. I have recorded it verbally just in case

I buy the farm, but the greater likelihood is that you'll see it as a journal in a few days.

[...]

I have a strong feeling that this whole experience was about me getting far enough out of myself to reach that book. Phil being able to drive us, doing his healing, me being able to go to that lovely, sweet place so rich with truth--none of it would have happened if I hadn't had this happen to me. So if its strange, out-of-the-blue suddenness was because of some sort of dark magic, it certainly backfired. But that's why I say that the dark side is also a servant of the truth, in that with its evil it brings also knowledge. The rest is up to us.

Betty Andreasson Luca gained notoriety in the late 1970s for her alien encounters that were written up in *The Andreasson Affair*. The 'blue book' was by her account a thin blue book of otherworldly wisdom given to her by an alien named Quazgaa in exchange for her Bible. The blue book was a book full of light and alien symbols that was taken away from her after ten days because she showed it to her daughter.

In Strieber's comment, he says that he woke up with the realization that during the healing session and the out-of-body experience (OBE) that his healer claimed he had (but that Strieber does not seem to remember having) he "read that book". Further, Strieber concluded that the whole reason for his back pain was to send him on his out-of-body journey to that book in order to read it.

What did the blue book consist of (according to Strieber)? On January 21, 2013, some three months later, Strieber revealed what it said:

Years ago, Betty Andreasson Luca was given a little blue book, which she put on a closet shelf. It later disappeared. Early last October, when I was suffering through a health crisis, I came into contact with a little blue book. In a comment made after publication of my October 5 journal entry, I said that I would publish what I remembered of its contents. Subsequently, though, things got much worse and I did not keep my promise as quickly as I had thought I would.

These are the contents of the book as I remember them:

15,000 years ago prior to planetary cataclysm injection of concepts: soul survival, deity, afterlife.

10,000 years ago establishment of construction sphinx express-

ing path to being harmony. Washing in planetary waters to bind.

5,000 years ago, injection of resurrection concept.

3,000 years ago, injection of single deity concept.

2,500 years ago, transmission of single deity concept to group-prone to dispersal.

2,000 years ago, resolution of resurrection concept.

1,000 years ago, surfacing of soul-coherence methodology.

That was all it said, and I have added the estimated times the events happened. Here is what I think they mean:

Injection of concepts soul survival, deity, afterlife. Around this time, burials began to appear suggesting that the survivors believed that the departed was going on a journey. At the same time, there was a tremendous planetary upheaval that almost obliterated the human species, and did render it extinct in North America. Gobekli Tepi was buried at this time.

Construction of sphinx. If the geologists are right, the sphinx was built during the time of Leo, and if Graham Hancock is right, the stars of Leo rose behind it during that era. The sphinx is a fundamental expression of energetic harmony: what has the strength of the bull, the courage of the lion, the wings of the eagle and the intelligence of the man is the transcendent being, which is re-figured in the 21st card of the Tarot, the World, which shows the four beasts of the sphinx surrounding a figure that is both male and female. The active and passive energies have come to energetic balance in this objective being that can look down on the world from the broad view of the eagle, and understand with its human intelligence what the view means, and face the truth with a lion's courage and a bull's determination.

Injection of single deity concept. This is probably the appearance of Akhenaten with his idea of the worship of the Aten, the solar deity, as the only god. After he died, his religion was suppressed. Moses was probably a priest of Aten, who took the idea of the single god into exile with him in the Sinai, and also the ethical tenets of the Coffin Texts, which became distilled into the Ten Commandments.

Transmission of single deity concept to group prone to dispersal. Biblical authors then changed the Aten into the fiery cloud of Yahweh, and the concept of the single god was exported from Egypt into Israel, where it gradually supplanted the old nature gods and is now the core concept of western religion and Islam.

Israel was a vulnerable place, and the Babylonian Captivity and then, in Roman times, the Diaspora, spread the Jews across the Mediterranean, and their unique concept of a single god with them.

Resolution of the resurrection concept. Among the earliest of human religious ideas is that the body may die and be resurrected. It is first expressed in the story of Isis and Osiris. Their ego-bound brother Set kills Osiris, whereupon Isis puts his body back together again and he is resurrected. Along with this idea comes the notion that there is a process in the afterlife that involves weighing the soul to determine whether or not it can enter ecstasy or must return to the physical plane. ‘Lightness’ is determined by weighing its acts of goodness and compassion against those of cruelty and indifference.

The story of Christ is a repeat of the story of Osiris, with Isis becoming his mother Mary instead of his sister. The idea that the body will one day be used again is an extension of the ancient Egyptian practice of mummification, which in the Christian tradition became preservation in a coffin, then later, the addition of embalming, so that the body will be ‘held incorruptible’ for the eventual resurrection of all.

Surfacing of soul-coherence methodology. I interpret this to mean the appearance of the Tarot of Marseilles somewhere around the 10th Century AD. The Tarot synthesizes the ancient way of the soul and shows how to manage the energies of life in order to become a sphinx, or transcendent being.

Anyway, that’s what I remember.^[11]

Strieber’s blue book is a terse set of statements that lays out the ‘facts’ about human history, including a past civilization, “planetary cataclysm”, ancient Egypt, and the purposeful injection of a “resurrection concept” into human culture. There is mention of “active and passive energies”, “soul-coherence methodology”, and even the Tarot.

The parallels with *The Key* are exact. In both cases the ‘true encounter’ takes shape only after the fact: for *The Key*, it took on its final form in late 2000 during the writing process; for the blue book it was the night after the healing session and written up months later. Both involve sleep: in *The Key*, Strieber was awakened in the middle of the night in order to have the encounter; for the blue book, Strieber was awakened in order to realize he had read it. Both overlap in terms of subject-matter in the

ways mentioned. The focus on the Tarot of Marseilles, of course, had a place in the ‘true encounter’ of 1998 since Strieber wrote his 2002 book *The Path* based on the Gurdjieff-inspired method of reading the Tarot that came to him supposedly after that encounter.

By his own account, it did not occur to Strieber until the middle of the following night that he had read the blue book. In other words, one may be so bold as to say, he dreamt it. (And this only after his “healer” helpfully suggested he had been having an out-of-body experience when he was passed out from pain.) Given the way the blue book’s subject matter fits that of *The Key* down to the distilled statements and omniscient tone, it is safe to say that Strieber’s imagination tends in that direction.

CONCLUSION

2016 WAS AN IMPORTANT YEAR for Whitley Strieber. It marked the five-year anniversary of the publication of the Tarcher version of *The Key*, the fifteen-year anniversary of publication of the Walker & Collier. It also marked the thirty-year anniversary of the writing of his bestseller *Communion* (released in early 1987), a decisive year for Strieber in which he became aware of his experiences, underwent hypnosis, wrote *Communion*, and ‘came out’ in a MUFON journal.^[1]

But 2016 was an important year for another reason. In 2016, Strieber released with his co-author Jeffrey Kripal, *The Super Natural: A New Vision of the Unexplained* (another “new vision”), a book which its publisher was calling “the most important book on the paranormal since Charles Fort’s *Book of the Damned* in 1919” a year before it was released.^[2] In this book, Strieber relaunches himself again as public intellectual of the close encounter phenomenon, pushing the intellectual community to put an end to its shortsightedness, re-formulating (again) his positions on the paranormal and the otherworldly, hoping to convince by his sheer thoughtfulness and to establish himself as credible. In this he is assisted by Kripal, who conveniently assesses Strieber’s claims from the truth-neutral position of folklorist and pop culture comparativist. Indeed, so truth-neutral is Kripal that he uncritically accepts and repeats some of Strieber’s truisms, e.g. that his career was ruined by a *South Park* episode.^[3] To date Kripal has failed to critically analyze Strieber’s

work — which is perhaps why Strieber calls him ‘the first academic to get my work’^[4] — content rather to treat Strieber’s work as a grab-bag of themes with which to highlight his own ideas.

This is not to say that Strieber’s work is not worthy of academic study. Certainly, Strieber, a *New York Times*-bestselling author with film credits to his name, who wrote successful horror novels and developed a whole body of work around alleged close encounter experiences deserves attention. Strieber’s body of work is richly textured, encompassing horror, political fiction, religion and spirituality, and is highly distinctive. It could well be true that no contemporary writer has had a career like Strieber’s, nor produced such a varied output. Likewise, few contemporary authors would inspire as many biographical questions, especially as regards personal psychology and alien abduction.

But Strieber’s work deserving attention is entirely separate from the intellectual credibility of that work. Strieber has said since its 2001 publication that *The Key* was his magnum opus, his “great work”, a book for which his whole life was preparation.^[5] And it does appear to be his ‘definitive’ statement, his most intellectually ambitious work.

But what does it say about a body of work — and a life — when its centerpiece is a book as fraught with problems as *The Key*? Even to those willing to grant that some close encounter witnesses are neither hallucinating nor lying, it seems that one is asked to accept a number of improbabilities with *The Key*. One is asked to believe that:

Despite the man showing up in the middle of the night at the so-called witching hour, asking Strieber to drink a white liquid, telling him the date of his death, and the various shifting descriptions from four-and-a-half feet tall wearing a military-style outfit to nearly six feet tall wearing a tasteful turtleneck — the meeting with the Master of the Key was a perfectly ordinary ‘true encounter’ and that ‘he was just as real as you or I’;^[6]

Despite the true encounter lasting fifteen minutes to forty-five minutes, and despite what was described as a “hyperdimensional” communication with choking sounds and growls and words in an English Strieber did not recognize — The Conversation represents a faithful word-for-word transcription of what was said which takes over two hours to read aloud, despite being reconstructed from perhaps a page of “squiggles” some two years after the event;

Despite Strieber reading aloud from the Walker & Collier version of The Conversation and quoting from it on his website; and despite the differences between Walker & Collier and Tarcher being arguably all

editorial — the Walker & Collier was the product of “sinister forces” censoring *The Key* and the Tarcher an authoritative ‘uncensored’ text;

Despite countless words and phrases appearing in Strieber’s earlier work along with countless concepts that are Strieber’s own; despite the Master of the Key’s predictions coming from science news of the time; despite the Master of the Key’s preoccupations and intellectual background aligning with Strieber’s in everything from wicca and Patanjali to crop circles and everything in the Art Bell milieu of the late 1990s on top of Strieber borrowing liberally from Gurdjieff, Talbot, and others — the Master of the Key was a *real, independent figure who was the originator of these ideas*.

PROBLEMS WITH STRIEBER

IMAGINATION

For years I have told of being present at the University of Texas when Charles Whitman went on his shooting spree from the tower in 1966. But I wasn’t there. [...]

For years I have explained my sudden departure by saying that I couldn’t stand the place after the Charles Whitman sniper incident. The truth was, I could have remained after that incident. It was my secret terror that drove me away. (Four)

CHARLES WHITMAN’S “shooting spree” took place in August 1966 when Whitman carried a personal arsenal to the twenty-seventh-floor observation deck of the Main Building at University of Texas at Austin and shot dead a dozen people, wounding many more.

Twenty years later in *Communion*, Strieber wrote about having falsely told others at different times that he had witnessed the shooting. He reported the fact in chapter four in a discussion of screen memories, suggesting that his memory of being there was a false memory standing presumably in place of some other. Later in the same chapter, he made a slightly different suggestion: that he told others he had witnessed the shooting to explain his “sudden departure” from the university; in other words, it had been less a memory than an excuse.

Of course, so-called screen memories in the abduction literature tend to be static, momentary distortions of real experiences that have

a basic similarity: to use an example Strieber discussed in *Communion*, someone has a memory of seeing an owl with unusually large eyes and later realizes that what he or she really saw was a gray alien.

But here is Strieber describing the shooting at which he would later admit he was not present in a 1985 interview:

“I had just had a Coke. I was walking from the student union to the academic center, which was an open-shelf library near the Tower, when I heard a sharp bang that echoed off the University co-op across the street behind me. And the reason I am alive today is that I didn’t turn around. I thought it was coming from the Tower. Maybe I saw some movement out of the corner of my eye. All the people in front of me thought the sound came from the co-op in front of us, not the Tower behind.

“The next thing I saw was a little boy on a bicycle coming toward me—his head just exploded. I didn’t hear that one. I knew then that it was coming from the Tower. The other people all took cover that shielded them from the co-op, but left them exposed to the Tower. They were all killed, shot. I ran to a little retaining wall about three feet high which was near that base of the Tower building, about twenty yards from it. And I laid down there.

“He shot two girls in the stomach right behind me, thirty feet away from me. And they were lying there in the grass, screaming, begging, pleading for help, trying to crawl along. One girl’s legs wouldn’t work. The other one was vomiting pieces of herself out of her mouth. And I could smell the blood and the odor of their stomachs, what was in their stomachs and their colons. The smell was horrible coming out of these poor kids, two young coeds. And he did that to get me and this other guy who was hiding behind this embankment to come out. I stayed there. I was sick with dread, watching them die, knowing that that gun was waiting. And the other guy suddenly went out and tried to pull one of them away and got shot in the head and killed. Whitman just shot the top of his head off.

“I stayed right where I was for a long, long time—until I saw them, with my own eyes, bringing Whitman’s body out. The ambulance men came up to me and said, ‘You can come out now, he’s dead.’

“But I would not move until I saw him.”

Today, some twenty years later, Whitley Strieber still lives

in the shadow of the Texas Tower. He sits with me, the tears of those memories burning his eyes, and he is afraid; and the rifle of Charles Whitman, striking from its godlike height, is the relentless symbol of the terror that he has learned to expect from life. (*Fear* 192–3)

Even accepting the validity of the category of ‘screen memory’ in alien abduction, the above description cannot count as a screen memory in any possible way. But it is interesting because it bears the hallmarks of many of Strieber’s ‘experiences’:

1. SELF-ORIENTED. Strieber is uniquely perceptive — the only one perceptive enough to realize that the shots are coming from “the Tower”. Everyone else gets killed. Strieber then is sought out by Whitman, who tries to lure Strieber out along with a double who is hiding in a similar way. Except the double does something foolish that Strieber would not do, and gets the “top of his head [shot] off”. Finally, the “ambulance men” come up and report to Whitley Strieber personally that he can come out and it is all over.

2. FACTUAL PROBLEMS. Besides the obvious problem of Strieber not having been there, one looks in vain for any little boy killed by Whitman. The youngest male victim was a certain Mark Gabour, who was sixteen and killed inside the building on the twenty-seventh floor.

3. MULTIPLE DESCRIPTIONS. As with the early accounts of the ‘true encounter’ with the Master of the Key, there are multiple accounts of Strieber’s experience during the Whitman shooting. As usual, the accounts are similar, but different in ways one would not expect possible were they recollections of the same event. Here is Strieber in a 1983 interview describing his experience:

I was right in the middle of it. I ended up hiding under a little retaining wall about 2 1/2’ high with another person. Everyone near us was shot--not all killed, but shot. As I lay under that wall with this other man right there, a woman suddenly began to scream about ten feet away from us. She was terribly injured. She had been shot in the stomach and she was wailing and bellowing, scrabbling along the ground with blood coming out of her. I was going to run to her when this other man jumped up, and the moment he did, Whitman shot the top of his head off. He had, of course, shot the woman in the stomach for the purpose of getting us to come out from where we were hiding. He was just waiting

there with this gun. I didn't move. That has haunted me all my life.^[7]

In the 1983 account, there was one woman shot to lure Strieber and the man out, and Strieber was about to go help the woman but the latter beat him to it, and Strieber's inaction has "haunted [Strieber] all [his] life". In the 1985 account, there were two women shot, but Strieber was too wise to go after the women because he knew the "gun was waiting". At a factual level, the two accounts could be construed as belonging to the same set of events—in one case Strieber may refer to only one woman because she was closer and he was 'remembering' her in particular at the moment of description. But it is the being 'haunted for the rest of his life' assertion that throws an attempt at harmonization out of joint. Being haunted for the rest of one's life is a single subjective orientation, a personal bottom line that ought to remain true from one account to the next. That in one account Strieber claims he is haunted by his inaction, and in the other the opposite seems implied—that with a snake-like cunning Strieber remained rooted to the ground—suggests that there is no real orientation to the event.

4. VIVID DESCRIPTION. Strieber's descriptions of his 'experiences', as in the case of the Whitman shooting story, are extremely convincing. They are compact in style, economical, and matter-of-fact. They also contain vivid, sometimes graphic details expressed with an originality of language one could easily think is coming from someone reliving an actual event and not the calculated language of a concocted story. Of course, given that Strieber apparently never saw the shooting and that there was no little boy on a bicycle whose "head just exploded", one can wonder about the imagination of a person who dreams up that:

He shot two girls in the stomach right behind me, thirty feet away from me. And they were lying there in the grass, screaming, begging, pleading for help, trying to crawl along. One girl's legs wouldn't work. The other one was vomiting pieces of herself out of her mouth. And I could smell the blood and the odor of their stomachs, what was in their stomachs and their colons.

Strieber has wondered about it as well. In *Transformation*, discussing the Whitman issue again, he wrote:

Was my whole life a screen memory? I halfway believed that I

had been with the visitors nightly for years. That was certainly how I felt.

But there was one incident that could determine for me the way a screen memory differed from a real one.

In *Communion* I reported, contrary to my earlier assumptions, that I had not been present on the campus of the University of Texas on August 1, 1966, when mass-murderer Charles Whitman opened fire and killed fourteen students from the Library Tower. For years I'd remembered being there but hadn't been able to find witnesses who could place me. At the time I was writing *Communion* I concluded that this must be another screen memory.

Since it was my intention to be as honest as possible in *Communion*, I carefully reported that I hadn't been there even though the memory was so realistic that I had actually given interviews describing the event in detail. I could have simply hidden the discrepancy, but I felt that candor was absolutely essential to *Communion*.

The fact that my memories of the Whitman incident were so vivid interested and concerned me. If screen memories could be this vivid, then I was lost. I would never be able to understand my past. (92)

Whatever his "candor", there is something highly disingenuous buried in the above. Strieber relates that because he "hadn't been able to find witnesses" to his presence on campus during the shooting, he "concluded this must be another screen memory". But it is incredible in the extreme to assert that it is on account of being able to find or not find corroborating witnesses that one's memory of being at such an event is true or false. One does not need to consult witnesses to know whether one was present at the Kennedy assassination, whether one was at his own wedding, or whether one was ever an astronaut.

The Whitman non-episode is useful in understanding *The Key* because it provides a unique clue to how and why Strieber confabulates. To understand it better, one must compare Strieber's two accounts in *Communion* of why he had invented his story.

To start, Strieber first puts his elaborate self-deception about the Whitman episode under the category of screen memory because it excuses him from the strong suggestion that confabulation is his own peculiar problem. Screen memories, if they exist, appear to be rooted in a kind of hypnotic suggestion: one sees a gray alien, but there is a

powerful suggestion given that one is ‘seeing’ something else that is similar, a large owl. The suggestion may contaminate the visual image to some extent, it may not. The screen memory in abduction is more a false belief about a memory that in turn impacts the memory.

But there is no indication that Strieber was at some sort of basically similar event — but with aliens — who then subtly altered his belief about what he experienced to correspond to a mass event happening at the same time. Instead, what appears to be happening with Strieber’s Whitman episode is closer to the other explanation he gave in *Communion*: that he told others he was at the shooting in order to account for his leaving the university.

To understand it we must look at the full context of this second explanation in *Communion*:

Some weeks later there was a frightening sequel. I was lying in bed at my grandmother’s house to San Antonio, reading Time magazine. It was late at night and I was about to go to sleep. In those days I used to stay with my grandmother when I went to San Antonio because my brother, then a teenager, had effectively taken over my old room at home.

Lying in that bed wide awake I had an experience so strange and frightening that I remember it to this day with total clarity. I was suddenly transported back in time and back to Austin a few weeks earlier. I leaped into my car and backed out of the apartment house parking lot. It was night and the windows of the car were closed. I couldn’t see out at all. In fact, I could see nothing but the reflection of the inside of the car. I was so blind that I was forced to stop. Something approached the car. I was frightened to see, peering in the window with its face pressed almost to the glass, what seemed almost to be a demon with a narrow face and dark, slanted eyes. It spoke to me in a high, squeaky voice, and I remember saying that we couldn’t leave the car out in the middle of the street.

Then I found myself in an agonizing struggle. I was at once in the car, fighting to keep driving away but unable to overcome an urge to get out and go back into the apartment, while simultaneously fighting, in the real world, an overwhelming urge to get out of bed and rush outside. I lay on the bed, flopping like a fish. Then it ended. Contrary to my impression, I did not move an inch. The magazine was still propped up in my lap. I could see

my grandmother in her bed in the room across the hall, reading quietly. This terrible nightmare had obviously caused not a stir.

Long into the night I lay with the light on. Toward dawn I slept. I believe now that this was a nightmare memory of an attempt I made to escape whatever unearthly thing happened to use in my apartment in Austin. I was reliving an experience which at the time it happened was so unspeakably terrifying that I still don't recall the actual event, only the dream.

There then began a pattern of running that has persisted in my life until the present. A few weeks later I suddenly became obsessed with the notion of getting away from the University of Texas, out of the United States, of going wherever I could, as far away as possible. I fantasized about living in a nice little apartment in some enormous city. I wanted bustle and bright lights, not the sparse Texas landscape and the starry nights.

I didn't have much money, so I contrived various means of getting enough to leave. I obtained a loan from the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation in San Antonio to study film at the London School of Film Technique. I earned some money translating Seneca's *Thyestes* into English and converting the translation into a film script for the U.T. Department of Radio, Television and Film. I worked as a camera operator. By January 1968 I had saved enough money and I left for London. I have never in my life been so glad to see the back of a place as I was to see the back of Texas. For years I have explained my sudden departure by saying that I couldn't stand the place after the Charles Whitman sniper incident. The truth was, I could have remained after that incident. It was my secret terror that drove me away. (Four)

It is clear that Strieber was experiencing terrifying, chaotic events. The Whitman non-episode therefore served a dual purpose. It explained to Strieber himself his own chaotic emotions and feelings of terror — he had been at the Whitman shooting. Second, it served as an excuse to others, allowing him to fulfill his true wish of getting as far away as possible, out of the country. Had the Whitman story been a simple lie, Strieber could have abandoned it immediately after getting his wish and making his way abroad. And even if later on he decided to use the tale to build his own legend as a writer, discussing it in interviews, there was only downside to declaring the whole story false in *Communion*.

Strieber evidently felt that he was in danger, and was terrified and

confused. The Whitman story ‘fit the facts’. But if Strieber is able to invent such a story to ‘fit the facts’ of his own internal emotional state and external situation and convince himself and others of it, how could one possibly go about separating the imagination from true events in Strieber’s life? It is a major problem for Strieber, which he himself knows. It is why, on the one hand, he disingenuously suggests in *Communion* and *Transformation* it is an issue of screen memory common to abductees in order to minimize it; on the other hand, it is why his books are littered with questions about the degree to which his experiences are imagined. The ruminations on imagination are, in fact, always strategically presented to suggest that Strieber is trying to be objective by asking if he is imagining things. But the problem of confabulation for Strieber is of much more urgent concern.

Consider this from *Communion*:

In November we closed on a co-op and by January 1981 had moved again, this time to our present apartment in the Village. A dozen times I have told a story of being menaced by an old college acquaintance, whose terrifying appearances and phone calls had driven us from our Seventy-sixth Street walk-up to Cos Cob, then from there to the East Seventy-fifth Street high-rise, and finally to the Village. A part of this myth is the kindly detective who hypnotized me and enabled me to identify this individual by listening to his voice on a tape.

Then we put a stop to his game by simply phoning him back after one of his vicious calls. But it didn’t happen: none of it happened. It’s just a screen memory, like the story of the six weeks in Florence that never happened. (After I realized that I had not actually been there that long, I began to believe another story, that I had gone to Russia and then to France, and been caught in the French strikes of 1968-without reference to the fact that they ended two months before I crossed France.) But why do I need these absurd stories? They are not lies: when I tell them. I myself believe them. I don’t lie. Perhaps I tell them to myself when I tell them to others so that I can hide from myself whatever has made me a refugee in my own life. (Four)

The way *Communion* is presented, and by using the concept of screen memory itself as a kind of screen, readers are left with the impression that Strieber’s ability to invent striking and believable events and to

convince himself and others of them belonged to his earlier life before *Communion*, before he faced the reality of his visitor experiences. In the passage above, Strieber presents his time in Europe as a series of escapes and himself as a “refugee”, and links all this to screen memory. Again, one has to ask whether among the accounts of any other abductees there are abduction events that go on for weeks and result in these kinds of post hoc confabulations. And as to whether Strieber’s perhaps fatal tendency to confabulate ended upon coming to grips with his *Communion* experiences, consider what Strieber says about the power of his imagination in an interview with Associated Press in 2006:

I live inside my stories. In other words I see what my character sees so vividly it’s like writing a description of a television image when I’m working.^[8]

Of course, this could be the bluster and self-promotion of an author secretly very satisfied with his imagination for other reasons. But given his account of the Whitman shooting, along with numerous other suspect descriptions, Strieber’s basic suggestion that his imagination has a life of its own could well be apposite. Now view his suggestion alongside his *Author’s Note* in *The Omega Point*:

From time to time I’ve read things in newspapers, only to look again a moment later and find them gone—and then to discover them weeks later in the latest edition of the same paper. Sadly, these little visions have not involved the stock market tables. An annoyance, to be sure.

The first of these involved the Claude Chabrol film, *A Girl Cut in Two*. I saw a listing of it in the *Los Angeles Times* in June of 2008, looked up and said to my wife, “There’s a new Chabrol movie. We’ve got to go.” I then turned back to the paper to find out where it was playing, and the listing had completely disappeared. There was no mention of it in the paper at all. So I went online and discovered that it had not yet been released.

Six weeks later, in August, I saw the same listing again. Naturally we went to the film.

Is it any wonder that Strieber cannot, for example, tell whether he revised his own book? Strieber, of course, would say of a given passage in *The Conversation* that it either matches or does not match his memory

of an objective event, namely, the ‘true encounter’. But as we have seen, Strieber is not reliable when it comes to this most basic mode of human memory.^[9] Strieber’s Whitman story had the full appearance of a factual description but was in fact a multi-pronged solution to an inner and an outer problem. Likewise the Toronto ‘true encounter’ with the Master of the Key bears the hallmarks of a confabulation to fulfill an inner and an outer need.

And was this problem with Strieber not clear from the beginning? Strieber’s writings and interviews have been riddled with statements of his own concern about imagination and confabulation. One finds this concern everywhere, expressed for example in 1988:

TA: The thing that was very noticeable in both books was that the more you remembered, the more you remembered, because it triggered memories.

STRIEBER: Yes! But there’s a problem with that. Not only does it trigger memories, it also triggers the imagination and you can’t tell which is which. Which is horrible [...]^[10]

and in 1997:

Strieber: Well, I’m pretty sure I did live one. When I first moved to New York, I got a Dover Book of photographs of New York in the 19th Century. And I was stunned at how familiar it was. And I’ve remembered bits and pieces of a life there, but not enough for me to say that I feel it actually happened. Because it could simply be my imagination playing off the photographs I saw. But that journey would suggest that it probably did happen and I had returned to that place and time.^[11]

and in 1998:

It’s a huge question when I’m writing a book because I don’t want to put my own dreams and imagination in it. I want to put in what really happened. And you know, it’s funny, the books always start out: the dots are perfectly connected and it all seems just as real as it can be. And my wife Anne reads it, and she’ll say, well, when you described this to me it didn’t sound like it does, you need to back off on this and make it a little less clear, less distinct. So the books are revised again and again, not to make

them more clear, but to make them less clear until they have the same flavor as my own actual experience did.^[12]

and in 2002:

And I suddenly knew the difference between my imagination and what was coming into me from the outside. Because there's a lot of stuff that comes into me from the outside, and it has this, it unfolds with the spontaneity as if it's happening in the world around me. With the same spontaneity that a car passes in the street or the wind blows the leaf. It's not something that I feel I am in touch with in terms of its creation. Other things that are more dream-like, they are...They are, uh, my imagination. And often they're pretty elaborate, too.^[13]

and in 2015:

Hughes: And you are a hugely creative man, this we know. Do you get accused of blurring the line between fiction and fact because you deal in both?

Strieber: In my own mind I do. How do I know? [...] ^[14]

The problem with Strieber and confabulation has thus been hiding in plain sight, lost in the factional dispute between skeptics and UFO-nauts as to whether there is any basic reality to otherworldly experiences in general. As is clear from the problems with Strieber and *The Key*, his tendency to confabulate did not cease when his pre-*Communion* experiences gained focus after 1987. In light of the foregoing demonstration that the Master of the Key was an invented figure who presented Strieber's own ideas, consider some of Strieber's verbal descriptions of this fantasy man:

The man was extremely happy. He was joyous in a way that makes you want to sing even to remember it after all these years.^[15]

One thing I will say about him, he was bubbling with joy. He was extremely happy. [...] He was quite serious in his presentation. But there was an inner core of joy there that was unmistakable. And infectious. He was a joyous man. Absolutely. And I felt that throughout the conversation. And I felt also the kind of edges of

darkness that were there. And sadness. That we were in the state that we were in. But I think the inner joy was just an abiding truth of his being.^[16]

But I remember he smiled at me with the strangest smile. It was like he had read a signal that had come out of me. And there was a kind of ferocious love in his face that was almost too much for me. It was almost more than I could look at. And I looked away from him. And my mind raced to try to understand something else to ask that would take me away from this contact. [...] ^[17]

I was face to face, I'm quite convinced, with someone who knew what the ecstasy of heaven is, who lived in it, and was living in it at that moment, presumably, on this extraordinary mission that he had undertaken.^[18]

His voice was very steady. It never trembled, but I could feel the emotion in it at times.^[19]

And I remember what his voice sounded like, it sounded like this...He said: NO! Like that. He said: No. All life is potentially ecstatic no matter what suffering or sin is involved. All life, child. And when he said that word, "child", I felt a kind of delight come over me. And [Strieber laughs] I remembered 'Be as the little children'. And I thought to myself: with him, I can! I can gain the enormous benefit suggested by the gospel. I can at this moment be as a little child, I have the chance! Oh, what a chance.^[20]

I remember very well the feeling that I had as this was being talked about. It was one of hunger. Because I realized that the speed with which he was speaking, he spoke like this. I'll give you an example. I would ask a question: why don't we surrender? And the answer would go like—would sound like this: why don't we surrender? Self-will, the illusion that [...] [*S. reads very quickly.*]

You see? I can't communicate the authority with which he spoke. But it was like that, it was very quick. He didn't have to think about it, he didn't say 'uh', he didn't pause. He didn't consider. Or anything like that. He spoke *immediately*.^[21]

A kind of further proof that *The Key* is an event of confabulation is

that Strieber is able to even abandon his usual strategic hesitancy when it comes to the ‘true encounter’ as if to compensate for its lack of reality:

I have begun my book about the lengthy encounter in Toronto that took place in June of 1998. Unlike the recent event, the reality of this one isn’t in question. [...] ^[22]

I think in this particular case, I would say that in some—most of my other books including *Communion*, I’ve never been absolutely sure where the facts...where the line is between facts and perception. In other words, I can describe what I saw and felt. But I can’t tell you that’s what happened. All I can say is that I’ve tried to be as accurate as possible in describing my perceptions.

In this case, in one particular way—there are two ways it’s quite different. The first is, the man I met seemed pretty normal. He was there. [...] ^[23]

That is, unlike the other efforts to petition the public with his experiences in which, as Strieber himself notes, he is always careful to ‘leave the question open’, when it comes to the ‘true encounter’ with the Master of the Key, there was no room for doubt. For Strieber, the encounter was “different”. When challenged even indirectly on the reality of the ‘true encounter’, Strieber can be evasive:

Would you ask him the question that your wife and I alluded to, that: is he you [from the future]?

I wonder if that would be possible. Because the principle of least action, which is a principle of physics, might make it impossible. Because that would violate the grandfather paradox. In other words, if we knew that for certain, then—I bet you I couldn’t ask it, and I bet if I could ask it, he couldn’t answer it. I bet that question would never come up even if I had really put my mind to it. ^[24]

In this unusually confused description Strieber seems to want to refute the notion he could even ask the Master of the Key whether he was in fact Strieber. According to Strieber, the principle of least action — used in one theory on how time travel might be possible — might itself “make it impossible” on account of the fact that asking would “violate” an aspect of a different theory involving the “grandfather” paradox in

which time travel is impossible. The argument makes no sense, and this is rare for Strieber, who strives for maximum clarity in his presentation.

In the same interview, Strieber again sidesteps a question that threatens to make him consider whether the Master of the Key might simply be his creation:

Could [the Master of the Key] be just manifested into a physical presence from perhaps some deep down questions you wanted answered?

[Long pause] Well, that in itself is a very good question. I don't think that we're even close to having answers to questions like that now. We've got a lot of work to do before we get there.^[25]

Such evasions suggest that Strieber would rather not confront the possibility that he is the originator of the Master of the Key's ideas. And it makes sense: one has to consider after all the tremendous investment Strieber has made emotionally in the Master of the Key, as well as the cognitive effort involved in both believing in an event that did not take place and suppressing memories of all the books and interviews in which he expressed ideas that he would impute to the man in Toronto.

Are the problems with Strieber and *The Key* explained simply by the fact that Strieber is an unusually confused man with an unparalleled ability to confabulate? In fact, the answer is both more and less than that: like the rest of us, Strieber is also very concerned with himself.

SELF-SERVING

AN UNDERCURRENT in Strieber's body of material over the years has been a tendency to insert himself into broader narratives of the UFO and conspiracy-theory culture. For instance, an oft-repeated story of Strieber's suggests that his father had foreknowledge of the Kennedy assassination:

When I was a young boy, my father was very connected in the Texas political machine. He was connected with John Connally and Lyndon Johnson — intimately so. The day before the Kennedy assassination he suddenly telephoned me at college and told me to get — I was in Maryland at the time — and told me to immediately go to Washington to go to my uncle's house. My uncle had been in the Department of State until Eisenhower had left office. He was a Republican, and was then a lobbyist but still living in

Washington — and to stay there until further notice. Of course, being a college student I was in the middle of my week of work. It was Wednesday and I didn't do it. The next thing I knew my father had chartered a plane and was flying with the rest of the family to Mexico when he had a heart-attack. And then the next day Kennedy was assassinated. And I have to tell you that after, in the years after that, I worked in the State Capitol and I had a couple of conversations, completely off the record of course, with John Connally, who said there was absolutely no question in his mind but that there was more than one shooter there. 'The whole place opened up' were his exact words, I believe, to me and a group of other young fellas working in that capacity there. ^[26]

The story, of course, highlights what Strieber has often said were his family's high political connections in Texas.^[27] Elsewhere Strieber has talked of having nearly gone into politics and also of being groomed for possible recruitment into the CIA, which even if true, seems also to reflect Strieber's vision of himself at his origins as a person of public importance. In the account above, two details are particularly slanted: one, the suggestion is made that Strieber's father's heart-attack is due to the stress of the knowledge of what is about to happen. This detail does not appear in other tellings of the same story. Two, Strieber says at first he "had a couple of conversations, completely off the record of course" with Connally, but he then reveals that Connally was speaking to a "group of other young fellas". The impression is created that it was Strieber and Connally having a one-on-one, which Strieber waits a few beats to correct. The biases in this account are all toward Strieber's self-importance.^[28]

Strieber also famously linked himself to the Roswell incident. Having written the novel *Majestic* about the purported UFO crash, Strieber has often explained his inside track into events:

And I actually had a certain knowledge of this because my uncle, Edward Strieber, was close friends with Gen. Arthur Exon, who was commandant of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and had been stationed there in the Air Materiel Command – they both had – in 1947. And General Exon told me in no uncertain terms, he said this: he said everyone from Truman on down knew that this thing was not of this world within 24 hours of our finding it. ^[29]

As if being tangentially involved in the Kennedy assassination and the Roswell incident were not enough, Strieber also witnessed first-hand the aftermath of cattle mutilation:

When I was about 10 years old, I saw a mutilated cow. I have never seen anything so bizarre, and neither had anyone else who was involved in that incident on a range in South Texas. Whether or not it is connected to the close encounter phenomenon, it is something that it would be good to find out. I cannot answer the question more fully than that. Next question? ^[30]

One difficulty with Strieber's cattle mutilation account is that he has also said he saw his "first cattle mutilation" at the time of his visitor experiences at his cabin in upstate New York:

I knew then that the visitors were extremely complex beings, not only brilliant, but conscious in a way that I am myself striving to be conscious. To, for example, have the compassion to give what is really needed, not the pretty little gift of a pat on the cheek, but the terrifying gift that challenges your spirit and makes it grow.

And then I saw my first cattle mutilation. It stank, it was horrible beyond description, on a friend's farm not too far away, an animal neatly sliced up, its teeth grinning horribly, the lips having been cut off with a surgeon's precision. It was lying in a mass of feces, which suggested to us that it had suffered its death while alive. Its eyes were gone, its vagina cored out.

And then my son began to report, at the age of seven, that he had alien visitors coming into his room.

I was so helpless then. Not even prayer seemed to matter. But, as my friend so succinctly asked me, when I bitched and moaned about the cow, had I ever visited a slaughterhouse? ^[31]

Another phenomenon Strieber participated in was that of noises from the sky. For nearly two decades reports have appeared in the media and online of loud disruptions from above, either 'booms' or something like trumpet sounds. The noises are evidently strange enough and sometimes disruptive enough that people have variously believed the end of the world was at hand or that automobiles had struck their homes. Strieber's website was reporting about the phenomenon as far back as 1998 with

many stories throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, and Strieber in a 2005 *Journal* entry wrote about “unexplained booms” in Indonesia.^[32]

In an audio program from February 2012 entitled “Whitley Strieber’s Experience with Strange Sounds”, Strieber revealed he had recently heard these sounds from above, not once but twice:

[8:30] Maybe at this point I need to say exactly what has happened to me. Because there’s been a few incidents and let me just run them down. All of the sounds – or rather, the first sound I heard, I heard with Anne. We were in the living room and it was in the evening, and suddenly this big noise like a great rushing noise filled the air and we looked at each other, and I said, ‘What’s that?’ And the next moment, the sound of a jet overtook the noise and the noise disappeared. And we were unaware of any of this at the time. And so we thought, well, it must have been something funny that the jet was doing. And we forgot about it. [Howe: Meaning that you weren’t aware of all the sounds--] Not at all. We weren’t aware of the strange sounds phenomenon at all at the time. [Howe: So approximately what date and time was that?] That would have been approximately three weeks ago.

Again, though Strieber’s website had been reproducing reports of the phenomenon for many years, Strieber says he and his wife “weren’t aware of the strange sounds phenomenon at all at the time” of the incident just a few weeks before.

In the same interview, Strieber describes another experience with noises from above just a few nights before:

[11:20] About three o’clock in the morning about five nights ago I was awakened by a sound. And this was like the rushing noise and it also had the drone in it like a trumpet, and it seemed to be coming from the air above the house. Of course, I once again grabbed for the phone and once again the sound ended. And this time I thought to myself: am I being teased by this? Is this somehow involved with me on a personal basis? Because quite frankly, I’m in a position — and so are you — where if something is going on, we might very well get tangled up in it personally in unusual ways. If there is some kind of intelligence behind this. So there you have it. I know something strange is happening despite all the hoaxes and all the denials and so on and so forth.

As so often happens to him, Strieber was awakened at three o'clock in the morning and the phenomenon immediately dissipated, but not before making Strieber wonder whether he himself had a personal relationship to it. With these two accounts, Strieber succeeded at experiencing both sides of the strange sounds phenomenon: the 'boom' and the trumpet sounds.

Strieber became a part of the notorious 'drones' phenomenon in a similar way. In May 2007, six photographs of a strange aerial object appeared on the Coast to Coast AM website purportedly submitted by a listener. Dubbed a 'drone', the strange-looking object subsequently appeared in other photographs posted on a variety of other sites in May and June.

The story was championed by Linda Moulton Howe, who reported on the story for both Coast to Coast AM and Strieber's Dreamland program, interviewing people who claimed to be witnesses. The images were widely decried as a hoaxes, with a variety of amateur and professional photographic analysts studying the images and coming to the same conclusion.^[33]

Nevertheless, several months after the 'drones' controversy had subsided, Strieber announced in December 2007 that he had been awakened in the middle of the night in order to see one.^[34]

We went to bed at about 11:30. I was up again shortly thereafter, struck with a powerful need to meditate. Then I went back to bed, but soon woke up once more. At 2:17 I was writing business emails. Shortly thereafter, I went back to bed. There followed something that may or may not have been a dream. I'll get to that in a moment.

I woke up at 4:53 because somebody was clutching two fingers of my right hand, which had been dangling off the bed. Anne was asleep on the other side of the bed.

I opened my eyes and saw the lit clock on my wife's side of the bed, and beyond it the window. I had a view of the sky through the window on the far side of the bed. The vertical blinds were three quarters open.

Gliding straight toward the house at what appeared to be a low altitude was a very complex object that must have been very similar to the 'drones' that were photographed by a number of people last summer. The thing was moving right under and in the cloud cover. It was stormy and the clouds were racing, but the

object had a stately, gliding motion that was totally unaffected by the weather.

My immediate thought was that it was a drone. I could not see any of the upper structures that are visible in some of the pictures, but only the body of the thing as it glided toward me. It was not far away at all, maybe just a few hundred feet.

As I got out of bed, I said to Anne, “there’s a drone outside the window.” We both got up. As I crossed the room to the windows, I grabbed my cellphone in hope of taking a picture. But when we looked out, we could see only the low, rushing clouds.

After a couple of minutes staring at a thickening in the clouds and wondering if that was the object, I went back to bed.

As soon as I put my head on the pillow, and was therefore looking out the window at the same angle, I could see the object again, this time moving west toward the ocean. I grabbed the cellphone and woke Anne up again. We rushed to the window and saw nothing.

When I lay down again, I could see the object. I finally realized that it was the angle that was enabling me to see the thing, and I went for the cellphone while still lying in the bed. But at that moment, the thing moved beyond the edge of the window, and I never saw it again at any angle.

Remarkably, Strieber writes that what he saw “must have been very similar” to the so-called drones. This is not the same as saying that it “was similar” or “looked similar”. Again, this is an instance where one expects a statement of fact from Strieber, but instead gets a conviction.

One could easily interpret his account as one in which entering a half-dream state with drones on his mind, Strieber ‘saw’ one, and subsequently, every time he woke up and got out of bed to photograph it, becoming awake in the process, it was ‘gone’. As Strieber writes in the same entry:

So this experience actually crossed waking and dream. [...] When I saw the drone, I was possibly in yet another universe, different from this one.

Strieber’s *Journal* entry also described his visions of himself that night in other universes. Notably, however, earlier that evening, according to the entry, Strieber had been reading *The Key*:

That evening, I had felt a compulsion to read the Key. I don't often read it, so this was unusual. But I couldn't seem to put it down, and kept reading and re-reading the same passage. The next morning, I opened the book again, and found that the passage had a great deal of meaning in view of what had taken place.

Strieber went on to explain:

Now to the part of the Key that I read with such eagerness the evening before, and pointed out to Anne the next morning.

The passage was this, from pps 34-35:

Have you traveled to other worlds? I belong to many worlds.

Are you from another planet that is like ours? I am human.

What's it like, going to another planet? The details from world to world can be very different, but the basic laws of reality remain the same.

I think that this passage is actually talking about being in a state that we have not realized even exists. When he says, 'I belong to many worlds,' I believe that he is really saying that he is conscious of many lives unfolding at the same time, and I find that concept remarkable. However, I know that it's possible because I have now done it.

The passage quoted by Strieber in this 2007 entry was from the Walker & Collier version of *The Conversation*. It is from one of the larger parts of the text where Strieber in 2011 said 'censorship' had been done. Here Strieber quotes from the supposedly altered passage and gives an interpretation, not noticing, of course, that any changes had been made.

Perhaps most incredible among the cases of Strieber inserting himself into larger events is that of 9/11. In this account from a 2006 *Journal*, Strieber heard of the first plane impact and knew before anybody else that both of the Towers would collapse:

I was half asleep in bed in San Antonio when I suddenly heard on the radio that a plane had struck the World Trade Center. I threw off the covers and headed for the TV, saying to Anne that I thought I'd heard that a commuter plane had hit one of the twin towers.

My immediate thought was that the tower might come down. I had two reasons to fear this: the first was that, when the towers

were being built, I had flown over them in the company of an engineer who was working on them, who happened to be my seatmate on a business trip. When I commented on how I had read that there was so much wire in them that the construction job had actually driven up the price of copper, he merely muttered that he wouldn't want to work in one of them, not ever.

I was surprised, and naturally asked him why. "They're deathtraps," he said. He went on to explain that they couldn't withstand much force because the curtains were load bearing, meaning that the outer walls bore the weight of the structure, or part of it.

He said that if a jet like the one we were in were to hit one of the towers midway down, it would almost certainly collapse. Given that one of LaGuardia airport's main approaches goes down the Hudson and doglegs around the tip of Manhattan, many hundreds of flights a week would be taking turns around the towers. I know statistics: I realized that the probability of an accident was there.

I was so struck by this possibility that I wrote a story about a 747 crashing into the towers and causing both of them to fall over. Where that story is now, I don't know. It's been at least 30 years since I laid eyes on it.^[35]

Thus Strieber not only knew the precise cause that would be eventually be given for the collapse of the Towers — he had even written a story about it.

The second reason given in the 2006 *Journal* why Strieber thought the Towers would collapse was that he had been told by a national security insider that all of the buildings of the World Trade Center and many important buildings around the country were wired for demolition in the event of foreign invasion. The story has competing versions. First, from the *Journal*:

The second thing that crossed my mind was that somebody had told me at some point that buildings in which US intelligence agencies have secret devices and classified information are routinely mined, so that they can be demolished if there is any chance that the secrets might be compromised. Understand, I don't know this for a fact, but it certainly seems possible that at least the areas where such secrets are kept would be capable of being destroyed if necessary.

I turned on the TV and saw smoke and flame pouring out of the first tower. My heart just broke, to think of all the suffering that must be going on in that structure, and the agony of friends and family on the outside. Then the second plane hit and I thought, “this isn’t an accident.” Then I thought of the National Security Agency assets in the Twin Towers and the CIA establishment in Building 7 of the complex, and I felt that it would not be long before they all came down, Building 7 included.

It seems somehow unlikely that Strieber would have known on the morning of September 11, 2001, of “National Security Agency assets in the Twin Towers and the CIA establishment in Building 7”, and even less likely that Strieber could be confident of the collapse of Building 7 before it happened.

Another version of the story appears in a July 2016 comment on his website. Strieber wrote:

I have often wondered what actually happened to the towers, as have we all. Years ago, I knew some people on the Senate Intelligence Committee. I happened to mention to one of them that I was going to the Windows on the World restaurant one night. He said that he wouldn’t do that, because the towers had extremely sensitive intelligence equipment in them, and were mined so that they could be brought down if control of them was ever lost to terrorists or a foreign power.

I went to the dinner, but it was one of just two times I was in the towers. I found them terrifying, you can be sure. Looking at the way they disintegrated, I have thought that the jet fuel might have set off the system that was designed to destroy them, making it look as if they were intentionally imploded. Building 3, which had the same system in it, I am sure, as it housed a CIA post, was intentionally imploded.^[36]

Compare this account to one given by Strieber in May 2013:

Some years later, after I wrote *Communion* and had a few conversations with some intelligence types who were trying to figure out where I was coming from, I guess, one of them mentioned in passing that all US facilities containing sensitive equipment and information were mined so that they could be destroyed at

a moment's notice. (We were talking about the visitors entering my house, and I said something like, 'what if they show up in the White House?', which elicited the comment.) The WTC never came up in that brief conversation, but when I saw the way the buildings dropped in on themselves, I thought back to it.^[37]

In the 2016 account, Strieber was told specifically to avoid the World Trade Center by someone on the Senate Intelligence Committee. In the 2013 account, Strieber was talking to an 'intelligence type' and the World Trade Center never came up. It seems that whatever the details, the important thing is that Whitley Strieber was tangentially related to events and had some sort of foreknowledge or special insight into them.

After the 9/11 attacks some skeptical of the official account alleged that anomalous trading was being done in the lead-up to the events including an unusually high volume of put options being bought on airline stocks. Not to be left out, in yet another 9/11-related tale Strieber says he himself observed strange trades being executed in the days prior to the event.

The fact of the matter is that there was activity in the stock market prior to 9/11. I saw it. I was actually an S&P trader at the time. And on Thursday before 9/11, the markets were acting oddly. I was trading S&P futures, short-term day trading them. I saw that there was something funny. I couldn't put my finger on what it was until Friday when I looked up the short interests and it was rising dramatically in the S&Ps and I couldn't figure out why. So I didn't trade because I don't trade when there's some big factor in the market that I don't understand. Friday came and Monday came and the short interest was even larger, and so I stayed out. And I was actually getting up on Tuesday morning, thinking about possibly doing some trading that day when the Twin Towers were hit. So I knew that at least from Thursday powerful interests were aware of the fact that something was wrong. Otherwise they wouldn't have been putting in that short interest.^[38]

Thus in a story told years after the fact, Strieber presents himself as perhaps unique in witnessing strange trades in real time and finding them suspicious.

It appears that like all of us, perhaps, Strieber is the star of his own

movie and this shapes his accounts.^[39] In his 9/11 anecdotes, Strieber has a relation to events, however small, and knowledge about the situation as it unfolded that others did not have, just as he did in his 1985 account of the Whitman shooting. But Strieber's tendency to place himself at the center of events can be even more pronounced. In his 2016 book *The Super Natural*, Strieber seems to say that he painted the image on the cover of his bestselling *Communion*: [ch 6]

Sometimes when Anne was sleeping or distracted or her face blossomed with pleasure, I would see in it a flickering shadow of the great-eyed being I'd painted for the cover of *Communion*.

Because elsewhere in that book Strieber writes of the image “[he’d] had painted for the cover of the book” (ch 2), the statement above could be the result of a typographical error. But the possible slip can also be viewed alongside another blurry claim of Strieber's to have translated the Betty Andreasson Luca ‘star language’. In Appendix Three in *Transformation*, it is stated that Leonard Keane made the ‘discovery’ that her glossolalia was ancient Gaelic and did a translation, though improbably Strieber also said: “I have listened to the original tapes and found that he did a careful and accurate job of transcription”.

That Keane undertook the translation is confirmed in a 1987 talk Strieber gave in San Francisco:

It turned out that an investigator, a rather obscure investigator named Leonard Keane thinks that he may have a handle or a line on this in his very tentative conclusions. [...] [28:35] What he found was, he could translate Betty Andreasson's star language because it wasn't a star language. It was Gaelic.^[40]

But in some accounts, Strieber has variously said that he translated it himself or that he was first to recognize it was Gaelic. An example of the latter:

I'm going to sort of change to a different subject right now, which is the subject of the star language. And this is the language that you spoke under hypnosis that I recognized actually when I saw it written in Ray's book and began to pronounce it myself as probably Gaelic. And I found a chap who could translate this. And he translated it.^[41]

His inflated role even appears in one of his wife's accounts:

When Whitley published *Transformation*, he wrote down some of the “star language” that Betty Andreasson had heard “aliens” speaking during her UFO encounter. Using a Gaelic-English dictionary that he found in a dusty old bookstore downtown that was going out of business, he translated it as “Children of the Northern peoples, you wander in eternal darkness.” This especially interested him because the Irish (whose original language is Gaelic) are famous for seeing fairies, elves and “little folk.” In his book “Passport to Magonia,” Jacques Valle guessed that these were other names for what we now call “aliens.”^[42]

Finally, Strieber's tendency toward self-aggrandizement surfaces in a most dramatic way in a comment made during a subscribers-only program in which he seems to suggest he was responsible for summoning the visitors into his life:

John Dee was perhaps the last of the great scientists of the old tradition. The tradition that looked to science as a way of finding balance and harmony with nature. Which is why his work today seems so bizarre and esoteric. Our minds have changed so much that now we look to science as a way of exploiting nature and it makes him seem peculiar and esoteric and strange. And these abilities that the scientists of that time had such as the ability to tickle the brain between worlds and open up briefly windows into parallel universes which is why he could conjure these beings that he saw. I mean, I can do it, too, which is what the whole body of my work is about. And I think those of you listening to this probably are already aware of the fact that I actually do know what I'm doing in that respect. Rather than — it was never an accident and it was never as unplanned as it has been made to seem in my public life.^[43]

When the entire *Communion* narrative was built on the surprise and even trauma of Strieber's ‘abduction’ and the complete mystery as to what the visitors represented, here Strieber is saying that it was “never an accident” and “never as unplanned as it has been made to seem” in “public”, evidently in his writings including *Communion*. This shows a willingness to contradict his entire body of work for a moment of in-

creased self-importance. Aligning himself with John Dee, a wizard and summoner, is more important than consistency with his narrative.

One gets the sense that the farther one travels away from actual events and the demands of factual consistency, the more self-oriented and self-important Strieber's narrative becomes and the more the fantasy of self is explored. Strieber's tendency to be self-oriented is given free rein in the Toronto encounter, with his special 'role' in the coming age having a primary emphasis in the earliest accounts, and with the 'true encounter' corpus as a whole being concerned with what books Strieber was reading, his childhood memories having a special place, unique and important messages being delivered to him alone, and overall, Strieber's own speculations being presented and validated by the Master of the Key. The self-oriented and self-serving aspect of so many of Strieber's 'experiences' clearly fulfills some sort of need.

EMOTIONALITY

STRIEBER'S EXTENSIVE BODY OF WORK offers a unique window into the mind and life of its creator. His many books, interviews, and *Journal* entries allow one to follow the course of Strieber's thinking over decades, and more than ten years of weekly audio programs allow one to listen to Strieber's voice and inhabit to a considerable extent the emotional world of Whitley Strieber.

But there is a further unique quality to Strieber's body of material, in addition to its considerable extent: its unusual, even excessive degree of openness. On the one hand, it is reflected in what Strieber takes credit for as his own "candor" when it comes to presenting even damaging details such as the problems with the Whitman shooting account. But on the other hand the openness seems to go further, and can be unknowing with Strieber giving away more than he realizes.

One sees this unusual openness in his short story, *Pain*. According to Strieber, it was written just as he was becoming aware of his *Communion* experiences. For the first quarter of the story, Strieber-as-narrator goes on a long digression into Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, the Roman Empire, the Kennedy assassination, environmental disasters, Nazis, and UFOs. It is especially with this last topic that one sees Strieber's unconscious on display, with the involved discussion of these various topics taking place long before the antagonist, Janet O'Reilly, is even introduced. It amounts to a ten-page-long Freudian slip.

Strieber has suggested that his early novels such as *The Wolfen* and

The Hunger show him working through unconscious material, in particular, his otherworldly contact with the Grays and the Blonds. Naturally, all writers draw on the raw material of experience, but the gratuitous transparency in Strieber's work goes beyond the conversion of past personal experiences into new narratives.

In a case where a literary Freudian slip made by Strieber is laughable, in his novel *2012: The War for Souls*, the main character Wiley Dale is a writer who is plainly a version of Strieber himself, as Strieber admits. At the same time, Strieber puts into the mouth of his Wiley Dale counterpart that he wants to fuck a certain character named Marla:

Henry lifted his arm, drew back his sleeve, and looked at his watch. "I'm relieved to say that we've come to the end of our time, Wiley. You can reschedule with Marla."

"Can I fuck her, too?"

"If you want to continue treatment with me, no." (Four)

Marla Frees, a celebrity psychic and an attractive woman, became a guest host on Dreamland in 2007, the same year Strieber's novel was published. How could a married man unconsciously entertaining an attraction to another woman use her real name in a published novel? And with a main character modeled on himself asking, even jokingly, if he could fuck her? Strieber certainly seems to have said more in this novel than he intended, though incredibly he would also claim that Wiley Dale was his wife's 'vision' of him.^[44]

In the 1985 interview with Douglas Winter, Strieber says, "I learned how to be naked before my readers in the sense of being exactly as I really am inside" (202). While Strieber may seek to take credit for "nakedness" before his readers in his early fiction, and then later for his "candor" in his close encounter accounts, one gets the sense that there is something else behind the superabundance of disclosure that marks Strieber's work.

After all, Strieber comes off as an emotional and shaken man. While extraordinarily well-spoken when it comes to the interpretations he wishes the public to adopt about his experiences, when it comes to describing those experiences Strieber can be a bit of a stammerer. There is a strong level of emotionality just under the surface that seems of a piece with his frequent expressions of feelings of victimization and his recurring trips into self-pity in his *Journal* and in interviews. In his *Report on Communion* Conroy writes of Strieber's mother's recollections

of him as a child:

If Karl Strieber was somewhat sensitive about how others saw him, it appears that his son Whitley could be fairly emotional at times, too. Strieber's account of himself as crying at not being able to join his friends being photographed surprised me somewhat, inasmuch as those of us of the male sex in our culture are generally trained not to cry, and rarely allow ourselves even to do so, even in childhood, much less admit having done so. That comment is borne out by an observation his mother made of him, though, in her interview with me.

"A lot of things were funny about Whitley when he was growing up," she said. "For one thing, I never saw a kid cry like Whitley. He'd cry at everything in sight." (55)

An elderly woman and mother of fully-grown children at the time of the interview, Strieber's mother seems to have been looking back across the span of years and recounting with a Texan economy of detail one of her son's most distinguishing and memorable characteristics. But Strieber's emotionality did not end with the passage into adulthood.

In a 2007 Dreamland interview widely noted in the blogosphere, listeners got to hear Strieber involved in an unusual spat with blogger and writer Daniel Pinchbeck. The interview was a trainwreck. It began with Pinchbeck sounding irritated and vaguely hostile to Strieber, and with Strieber less interviewing Pinchbeck than eliciting answers which he could then embroider with points from his own perspective. Soon a petulant Pinchbeck took umbrage at one of Strieber's suggestions, namely that mankind was facing a "die-back", charging Strieber in turn with spreading negativity and perhaps being controlled by evil forces.

Strieber: [...] I see a tremendous decline and die-back of the human species taking place over the next hundred or a hundred-fifty years.

Pinchbeck: OK, so I just want to point out that's your shadow projection.

Strieber: It'll happen.

Pinchbeck: I just want to point out that you don't know that's gonna happen, and it's actually just your shadow projection. From where we are now, there's enough food to feed the people on the earth. It's not necessary that that's going to decline to an

extent that's going to lead to huge die-off by 2012. So what you're doing, you're putting out there your shadow projection. Where is that coming from?

Pinchbeck continued to accuse Strieber of poisoning the earth's consciousness with his "shadow projection", linking Strieber's negative outlook to possible influence on him by the 'visitors':

And I also find it interesting that you would have that perspective considering your 'communion' with entities who from my perspective are not wholesome and may not be looking forward to our best interests on this planet.

In one heated and confusing exchange:

Strieber: You tell me the entities are supposedly negative when you don't know jack-shit about those entities because you've never had any contact with them at all.

Pinchbeck: I read *Communion* several times—

Strieber: You read it, but you didn't read it.

The strange and tortured pathos of the conversation combined with the subject-matter of two competing fantasies about 2012 made it all but incomprehensible. Pinchbeck, using a millennial's uptalk at the end of most of his sentences, charged Strieber with what was perhaps the most terrifying claim that could be laid against him personally: that he was not in charge of his own mind. Strieber, deeply wounded, responded:

Strieber: [...] We're not friends anymore, we will never be. We never really were. I literally could not disagree with you more profoundly as you propose what looks to me like a kind of a miserable fascism on the human spirit. And a future that is enormously dreary even in the unlikely event that it should unfold.

Pinchbeck: By the way, Whitley, I just want to say that I'm capable of having an argument with somebody and profound disagreements with somebody and still considering them friends. And that I do really appreciate you having me on the show.

Strieber: Well, I'm glad you appreciate being on the show. But I'm telling you right now when you attack my very being and my spirit by saying that I'm in league with evil entities as you did

say, that's not, it's not possible to maintain a friendship under those circumstances because this is so outrageously untrue. And for those of you who are subscribers to this website, who listen to our meditations, and who are involved in this, you'll know how unfair and outrageous this attack that this man carried out on this radio program was. It's just disgusting. And ignorant. Absolutely ignorant.

Strieber's response to this onslaught in the end was thus to rather pathetically declare that Pinchbeck was not his 'friend'. The oversensitivity and emotionality in Strieber is visible elsewhere in his output. Strieber routinely rails against those he feels who have treated him unfairly, and in his books, *Journal*, and interviews, Strieber seems to be constantly nursing his wounded feelings. Whether it is Matt Lauer from *The Today Show* or Larry King,^[45] Strieber returns again and again to those times when he feels he was victimized, though in the case of certain interviews, one is at pains years later to see how they were overly harsh. Part of Strieber's personal mythology is that as a young boy he was involved in some form of military-related experimentation on children using high stress. And, indeed, it is indisputable that Strieber has been subjected to ridicule, for example by comedian John Hodgman at a TED talk recently replayed on National Public Radio,^[46] an event which did not escape Strieber's notice and to which he has repeatedly returned. But while Strieber's emotionality and oversensitivity may be related to high stress in childhood, to contact experiences, and to having been subject to public ridicule, these do not exhaust the childishness and the child-likeness of Strieber.

A number of audio programs are available on Strieber's website in which Strieber reads from his own works including his short stories. Not a trained voice actor, Strieber nevertheless tries to imitate his characters' voices and provide sound effects as indicated by his texts. The result is embarrassing. But it is not because Strieber is attempting a performance with poor results. Rather what one hears in Strieber's voice as he does his own voice acting is a child-like quality, as if the inner world of the imagination were fully on display. Children at play with dolls or action figures in imaginary scenarios are able to disappear into themselves even in the presence of adults. But in adults this type of interiority is never seen, except perhaps when one is walked in on by another person by accident.

In Strieber's case, one gets the sense the evacuation of imagination

from interiority that comes with adulthood never occurred. That is, the connection to a richly developed inner world of imagination that is lost with adulthood was not lost for Strieber. Unlike other writers who *undertake* to *imagine*, Strieber is *taken* by his imagination. Strieber is committed to his imagination as this is also a commitment to his own interiority.

Ultimately, it is Strieber's commitment to his own inner life that best makes sense of the often obvious inconsistencies and contradictions of his accounts. Many have criticized some of the more superficial inconsistencies in his work, ones better explained as Strieber stressing different aspects of an experience at different points in time. But when it comes to the more self-aggrandizing absurdities or to complete inventions like the Toronto 'true encounter', one gets the sense that Strieber is willing for these to enter full public view because he is at bottom committed to their life in his own inner world. Just as he claims experiences live on in eternity as "works of art", Strieber seems to entertain a variety of fantasies, great and small, because in the life of the imagination they are living things with inherent value. One can hear this devotion to his inner life behind Strieber's words when he says:

And what I've ended up with is what I think is the most — one of the most beautiful and important and valuable messages the world has ever seen.^[47]

The slip between "the most" and "one of the most" reveals Strieber's true feelings about these gems of his inner experience. But forever keeping one foot in an inner world has also made Strieber into something of a bumbler and rather foolish: he is prone to set fires,^[48] afraid of puppets,^[49] and by his own account he is 'easily hypnotized'.^[50] Yet one should not think Strieber all fool. Strieber also regards himself as a man of public importance, a bearer of world-historical messages, or as he has called himself: a "soldier".^[51] As a combatant in the public arena, he can be very slippery and very strategic.

STRATEGIC

WHATEVER THE DISTORTIONS caused by Strieber's imagination and his emotionality, Whitley Strieber is a highly intelligent man capable of making subtle distinctions and approaching an intellectual problem from many directions. Thus when Strieber decides to dissim-

ulate or when he takes up a position to defend himself or to advance an idea he can be strategic, even slippery. One need only look to Strieber's statements about the extent to which he is religious:

<i>Strieber as non-believer</i>	<i>Strieber as believer</i>
I'm not really much of a believer. ^[52]	I am not a conventional Christian, but I am certainly a believer in the intelligence and compassionate insights of Jesus, and the meaning of his resurrection. (<i>Omega</i> , Note)
I'm very dubious about the idea of God personally. ^[53]	I suspect that's why I feel as if God was staring me in the face every moment that I'm alive. I think it's literally true. (<i>Rep</i> 345)
If anything, I'm an atheist. ^[54]	So, if some time traveler came back with proof that Jesus had never existed, it wouldn't shake my faith at all. Nor does the corruption of Islam shake my faith in the word of God that sifts through the Koran like a sublime perfume. In fact, nothing shakes my faith. Nothing can. Faith is far deeper than belief, and the two should not be confused. ^[55]
I'm about as religious as Christopher Hitchens. ^[56]	You know, I'm a very faithful person and I swear to you by the religion in which I believe that I did not. ^[57]

Allowances must always be made for views changing over time, and even shifting perspectives from moment to moment. But Strieber is also the man who named his most famous book *Communion*, a book which could be regarded as a work of Catholic mysticism. Strieber quotes from the gospels constantly in his non-fiction and his *Journal* entries, and

routinely uses bible quotes to introduce chapters or sections of his novels. The Walker & Collier edition of *The Key* was dedicated to “the prophet Daniel, and the great vision he left for our time”. Strieber can say “I’ve never not been a Catholic”, and his own visitors-theology has been so heavily influenced by Catholicism that he might one day be seen as a Catholic intellectual theorizing contact. Indeed, so committed is Strieber to his Catholicism that he can even equivocate about the Catholic child abuse scandal, writing: “But I really wonder if the scandal is as deep as it has been portrayed”.^[58]

This ability to dance for different audiences and to effortlessly play between versions of his self-image was visible as far back as *Communion*, and it did not escape the notice of critics. Strieber presented himself in *Communion* as an aloof intellectual whose secular worldview was violently overthrown by the enigmatic experience with the visitors. But as Conroy detailed in his *Report on Communion*, Strieber had an unusually strong interest in aliens and the occult at a young age.^[59] And later in life Strieber not only participated for thirteen years in the Gurdjieff Foundation doing meditation and studying the Tarot and other esoteric ideas, he went on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to defend wicca and even said he had practiced as a “witch” in his 1985 interview with Douglas Winter. Strieber’s story *Pain* written near the start of his *Communion* experiences shows a set of intellectual concerns that put him at far remove from the category of “average skeptical intellectual”.^[60] Yet, for all the obviousness of these contrary tendencies, Strieber still presented himself as a middle-of-the-road intellectual in *Communion* even when mentioning Gurdjieff, the Tarot, and so on.

Strieber is thus able to position himself in complicated ways in order to answer or forestall criticism. But this can lead to absurd, objectionable results. As noted previously, in audio commentaries on *The Key*, Strieber discusses certain passages of *The Conversation* that clearly involve Gurdjieffian concepts and vocabulary, but then names Gurdjieff as if supporting evidence for the statements of the Master of the Key. It never occurs to Strieber that it should do the opposite: i.e. suggest that Strieber wrote *The Conversation* by filling the Master of the Key up with Gurdjieff.

And Strieber’s slipperiness can be even worse. In an interview from 2011, Strieber is asked about a sub-narrative from *The Conversation* in which a ‘war’ with Mars took place in distant prehistory. True to form, Strieber offers two outside anecdotes in support of the Master of the Key’s scenario without realizing that critical parts of these two anecdotes also appear verbatim in the text:

There's a portion in here where he was telling you about your victors are effectively holding you captive. I'm trying to figure out or get my head around who are the victors, who did we go to war with. Can you flush [sic] that out a little bit as far as what that meant?

Well, I can't say what he thought it meant. I can say what it would mean, what it might mean to me. [...] [43:10] In 1985, October/November of 1985, I was discussing the Viking image of the face on Mars with Richard Hoagland, Greg Molnaar, Vince DiPietro, and a number of others. One of us, I don't know which one, it wasn't me and it wasn't Richard, said in this internet relay chat we had — the internet was in its infancy then and it was a chat system I think that belonged either to NASA or to one of the universities that one of the participants in the conversation was at, said something extraordinary, he said: Mars was murdered. He pointed out that the DNM [sic] pyramid had been entered at its base. There was a crater at its base that was an intrusion point. And you can see on the opposite side of the pyramid where something has caused it to collapse in on itself.

Now I'm going to go forward a bit. And I'm just piecing things together here, just little crumbs that I have. To a letter I received sometime after I published *Communion*, probably about six months. From a woman who had been walking in the woods with her little nine-year-old boy. And she wrote me because a dark blue figure like some of the ones I described in *Communion* had come face to face with her in those woods. He had come out of a cave, this small dark blue figure, and he spoke to her. He said that he was a rebel. And that there had been a war between earth and Mars before our history even began. And that both sides had lost in the sense that we had stripped Mars of its livability on the surface, but they had captured the human soul. And they now forced us to live in a perpetual state of recurrence, never making any progress. Dying, and then being reborn into the physical, and dying and being reborn into the physical, forever strapped to the wheel of life. And he said he disagrees with this and thinks that we should be let free. And he said his people call earth 'Dead Forever', that's their name for it. [...] And I've wondered if those enigmatic statements by the Master of the Key don't perhaps resonate in some way with this story.^[61]

In fact, the Master of the Key's statements more than dovetail with

the quoted stories. The Master of the Key explicitly draws on both episodes of Strieber's life — his participation in the internet relay chat and his receipt and reading of the letter — by using the same two operative phrases, 'mars was murdered' and 'dead forever' verbatim. But rather than realize that he is drawing on his own experiences to create a synthesis that forms the true basis of the Master of the Key's "enigmatic statements", Strieber performs a subtle, slippery reversal making the source of those statements *a posteriori* supportive evidence for them.

Such slippery, judo-like reversals are related to a broad rhetorical strategy of Strieber's: presenting the otherworldly experience as vividly as possible (implicitly arguing for its actuality), then hedging his bets by paying lip service to 'keeping the question open'. And then, sometimes owing to his "candor", mentioning an item that clearly ought to cast doubt on whether his experiences were at all real, but doing so in passing — or worse, incorporating the detail into the narrative. One sees this, for example, in *The Secret School*.

From a certain point of view, *The Secret School* seems written simply to convince the reader that Strieber was a brilliant child full of prophecy and prediction. Articles from recent science news are used as basis for Strieber's childhood visions as when Strieber as a boy supposedly witnesses the formation of the earth-moon system and 'sees' the single-crystal core of the earth (a theory since abandoned). Popular culture and technology of the mid-nineties is also implicated in the childhood visions as when Strieber sees people wearing virtual reality helmets.

In one vision while wearing a virtual reality helmet at the secret school, Strieber is suddenly on an asteroid heading toward earth. Some sort of planetary catastrophe was imminent. But Strieber understood what was happening:

The planet below began to get much larger. Because of a movie I had seen, *When Worlds Collide*, I was well aware of the meaning of this phenomenon. (97)

As usual with Strieber's 'visions', a terrible event is unfolding and Strieber has some sort of special or inside knowledge about it. But here Strieber also discloses what was probably the source of the vision — a movie — deftly incorporating it into the vision in order to neutralize it.

Absurdly, the same seems to occur with two of the book's overarching concerns: ancient Rome and ancient Egypt. Strieber as a young boy has vivid visions of both — especially Rome — and the better part of

the book is spent on these visions as when Strieber remembers that in a past life he was a tutor to Octavius, later Augustus, and even played a role in preserving the Roman Empire. And that Strieber played a role in comforting Cicero just before his unseemly execution.

Again, the fantasy of self is being explored in such visions. Strieber's imagination chooses roles for him that are not outwardly crass or straightforward self-aggrandizement. He is not Octavius; but he does happen to be a tutor who guides the later emperor and indirectly changes world history. He is not Cicero; he does happen to be a shade from the future who can comfort Cicero that his works will survive just before his execution. *The Secret School* would have readers believe that Strieber is preoccupied with ancient Rome today because in past lives he lived there and walked around in that city, as indicated by the many visions in the book. Strieber writes near the end of *The Secret School*:

I was a yearning child in a summer of mysteries, the most extraordinary of which was just about to unfold. It had become a summer of obsessions and the latest was Rome. I could see Roman faces and walk in Roman streets. I could perceive a Roman life unfolding as a kind of superposition on the trees and bicycles and movies of ordinary days. The people of Rome became as real to me as my own friends and family. [...]

But then one encounters the last sentence of the paragraph:

I bought *Augustus Caesar's World* by Genevieve Foster, and spent hours dreaming about the life of the young Octavius. (174)

If other similar instances are any guide, Strieber is less likely recovering memories of childhood in which he had visions of past lives than he is inventing them. And he is strategically incorporating the fact that he was voraciously reading books on these past places into the narrative.

Afterward, I read *Augustus Caesar's World* until I got drowsy. Along with *The Glory of Egypt* by Michel Audrain, bought the next year, and *Never to Die: The Egyptians in Their Own Words*, by Josephine Mayer and Tom Prideaux, this book is the only possession I still retain from those years. These three books, which have stayed with me always, were also the closest things to textbooks that I had in the secret school. (179)

One is four-fifths through Strieber's book of visionary childhood past-life memories before one is told with clarity that Strieber was reading about both ancient Rome and ancient Egypt as a child. When combined with the fact that Strieber's childhood visions seem to arise out of the science news of the mid-nineties at the time Strieber was writing *The Secret School*, along with the fact that the book's spiritual and metaphysical insights all seem to reflect Strieber's thinking from that period, the whole book appears as self-indulgent fantasy. Unable or unwilling to separate actuality from imagination, Strieber becomes doubly committed to his 'experiences' as they are unique and wonderful as experiences (and affirming for Strieber) and also unique and wonderful moments of storytelling. The "superposition" of these experiences, occupying places of both wondrous fact and wondrous imagination, is ultimately what makes Strieber so wedded to them; thus his willingness to put them before the public.

This commitment accounts for how and why it is that Strieber is willing to draw from all manner of sources in order to craft his 'experiences'. One sees this willingness even in something as small as this 'apple crunching' metaphor in *Communion*:

During the third week of March I had a very peculiar thing happen to me. Sometime in the night of March 21 at the cabin I awoke and found myself unable to move or even to open my eyes. I had the distinct impression that there was something in my left nostril, and that it was being slowly moved far up my nose. When I tried to struggle, I heard a pop like an apple crunching between my eyes. The next thing I remembered, it was morning. (Four)

After a short discussion of the temporal lobe and its function and what temporal-lobe epilepsy is like, Strieber presents the following as corroboration for his experience:

As it happened, the week after I received Dr. Klein's letter I met a woman who has had the visitor experience; she began her story by saying that the visitors inserted a probe into her nose, which made a sound "like an apple crunching," between her eyes.

The point here is not that the experience of something being inserted into the left nostril did not happen. Rather, with this particular example what one sees is a vivid metaphor being used by Strieber with his story-

teller's art in such a way that we are convinced that his experience and the expression "apple crunching" are one and the same — that the latter arose organically out of the former. But then shortly thereafter, we find that the woman's story is where Strieber really got the metaphor.

A major problem with Strieber, then, whatever his almost cloying earnestness, is that he is not above misleading his audience and himself in the pursuit of his art. This art includes having 'experiences' that exist in 'superposition' as stories. Whatever the gratuitous degree of transparency offered up as honesty — his willingness to admit he was not at the Whitman shooting, along with the contradictions, inconsistencies, and abundantly obvious Freudian slips ^[62] — Strieber is highly skillful in the presentation of detail in order to convince himself and others. He can be slippery and strategic when on the defensive and when playing to different imagined audiences.

TOWARD A THEORY OF STRIEBER'S WORK

STRIEBER is often regarded as a horror novelist of the Stephen King generation made famous by *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger* who then went on inexplicably to write *Communion*, a genre-busting horror memoir that effectively ended his career. But the arc of Strieber's career is somewhat different: first a horror novelist, Strieber's writing began to quickly change and move more into line with how he really saw himself: a public intellectual with an eye toward shaping public debate. As Strieber himself says:

From 1977 until 1983 I wrote imaginative thrillers, but in recent years I had been concentrating on much more serious fiction about peace and the environment (*Communion*, One)

War Day (1984) and *Nature's End* (1986) were both public advocacy novels, the former warning against nuclear war, the latter against environmental catastrophe. One sees in Strieber's fairly rapid turn from conventional horror another dimension of Strieber's life. As noted previously, Strieber's personal narrative involves in part notions of his family's political well-connectedness in Texas, ideas that he was being groomed for the CIA or for public office.^[63] With his public advocacy novels of the mid-eighties, Strieber was stepping into the role of public intellectual, a man of letters wanting to shape public discourse.

Communion thus should not be seen as a stunning reversal on his personal trajectory, but as the culmination of it: with *Communion*, Strieber became the public intellectual of the close encounter phenomenon, a phenomenon he put forward as the most important issue facing mankind, allowing him to dispatch public warnings with even greater urgency and authority.

The failure of Strieber's mission was not immediate. Contrary perhaps to today's assumptions, for a short time after *Communion* there was an openness in certain quarters to his message. The public, skeptical but willing to cross some of the distance, simply wanted proof.

Strieber's actual failure began with the failure to produce that 'proof'. In refusing to admit what was plainly required, *Transformation* and *Breakthrough* can be seen as rapidly diminishing levels of success in the attempt to enlist science, media, politics to engage with the phenomenon with Strieber as the 'credible voice' urging them on. Indeed, the failure of the *Communion* project took something of the form of a vicious circle. The more public wanted proof, the more Strieber offered them Gurdjieffian and Eckhartian ruminations, fragmentary memories, and high imagination; and the more Strieber in turn was satisfied with the originality of his art and personal brilliance, the more he felt justified in calling for science, the intellectual world, and policy elites to squarely face the question of contact, and in growing frustrated when they did not.

This compound failure is what could allow Strieber, absurdly, to write in *Transformation*:

Short of actual, physical evidence, I think that I have gone as far as possible to demonstrate the reality of the visitors. (9)

Strieber took the collapse of his public mission personally. As it occurred, he 'lost the cabin', a phrase he has since repeated endlessly through the years as a kind of mantra of personal loss, the cabin being the symbol of his financial success and his independent and successful relationship to the New York literary world. Of course, Strieber's success as a mainstream writer was the basis of his credibility and the authority on which he spoke. When he 'lost the cabin' in 1994^[64] and returned to his hometown of San Antonio, Texas, after having declared bankruptcy to live in an apartment where his mother had lived, that authority was all but gone. With *Confirmation* (1998) Strieber's public advocacy mission finally crossed the finish line. A book whose title was

chosen as if in stubborn denial of its actual place in the *Communion* effort, *Confirmation* came more than ten years after *Communion* when goodwill toward Strieber had evaporated and the public had already long since given up on any expectation that ‘proof’ would be produced. As Strieber conceded in a 2012 interview, *Confirmation* “failed” and had “a dismal sale”.^[65] *Confirmation* marked the close of Strieber’s career as close encounter intellectual and the end of the *Communion* mission. But though the *Communion* effort had failed, as far as Strieber was concerned, responsibility for the failure lay squarely with the intellectual, policy, and scientific elites and the public — not with Strieber himself or his work.^[66] Strieber’s feelings of victimhood blossomed. And at the end of the book tour for the final book in the *Communion* project, a book that was a self-evident failure at bringing the world around to the reality and the importance of the abduction phenomenon, the Toronto ‘true encounter’ took place. That is, at the very moment Strieber’s self-worth was at its lowest, on the very last day of his role as public intellectual and mainstream truth-teller, the Master of the Key appeared at his hotel room door in the middle of the night to tell Strieber new and important truths that happened to be his own.

Strieber’s deep sense of rejection is evident from his interviews and his writings.^[67] Since *Confirmation* there has been a marked embrace of victimhood in Strieber’s work. But his construction of a narrative of victimization has some questionable elements. One of these is the frequently made claim that *South Park* ruined his career with its pilot episode, “Cartman Gets an Anal Probe”:

As a result, *Transformation* was read by five million people, *Breakthrough* by just six hundred thousand. By the time *Confirmation* came along, my media exposure had degenerated into a grotesque identification of me as in the rectal probe man, thanks to cartoons like *South Park* and the *Simpsons*.^[68]

The *South Park* episode premiered in August 1997. Strieber has returned to the matter of *South Park* and its creators many times:

The visitors brutalized me on that night. But they only raped my body. My heart and soul were raped by people like Matt Stone, Trey Parker and Craig Ferguson.^[69]

And I found myself lampooned on *South Park*. It was hard. It’s

hard to have an experience that traumatic and then, you know,
just become a figure of fun because of it.^[70]

While one can understand Strieber's distress at something painfully experienced appearing on a cartoon, one is hard-pressed to see how exactly it ruined or damaged his career — or for that matter involved him at all. Though the aliens are referred to in the episode as 'visitors', there is no character based on Strieber in the episode, no writer, for example, getting probed. And by 1997, a variety of books by people like Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs had discussed the rectal probe, and it had become a common comedic trope appearing in films like *Joe Versus the Volcano* (1990) and *Passion Fish* (1992). One wonders whether *South Park*'s demographic of juveniles watching late-night cartoons instantly connected Cartman's anal probe with Strieber's book from ten years before, and how many readers from this erudite group were lost to Strieber.

More relevant perhaps is that at the time of *Confirmation*'s "dismal sale" in 1998, Strieber had recently been associated with the Hale-Bopp fiasco. Just a year before in the notorious Heaven's Gate tragedy, thirty-nine people committed suicide thinking they would join with a UFO following the Comet Hale-Bopp. The idea that a UFO might be following the comet was presented to the public at large by none other than Art Bell and Whitley Strieber on Coast to Coast AM. While Bell and Strieber were in a sense also victims of the hoax, and later distanced themselves sharply from the event, here is Strieber giving the odds on-air that the Hale-Bopp spacecraft was real:

Bell: On a scale of ten, all the information presented tonight,
how high a probability do you give it that what we are experienc-
ing right now is indeed first contact?

Strieber: An eight.

Bell: An eight out of ten.

Strieber: Yeah, and I'll tell you why. [...]

And here is Strieber saying he was praying for the 'visitors' a few minutes later:

I was at mass, and I had a very powerful feeling of the presence
of the Grays. And I often pray for them. Because if they're bad,
they need it, and if they're good, they'll like it. [...] You know I feel
very much protected by God.^[71]

While there is no way to say with certainty what determined Strieber's book sales, it seems at least as likely that an overall fatigue with Strieber's work and Strieber's association with Hale-Bopp sank his sales as *South Park*'s rectal probe humor. With any personal narrative, there is a selective presentation of detail, and Strieber's is no different.

Perhaps the strangest issue with Strieber's narrative of victimization is the question of whether he was raped during his *Communion* encounters. In *The Super Natural*, Strieber writes of his inability for many years to describe the *Communion* experience with the 'rectal probe' as rape to his wife:

It took me a quarter of a century to even describe the experience as a rape to my wife. (ch 2)

As I have said, it took me twenty-five years even to admit to my wife that I had been raped. (ch 6)

Strieber had been saying something similar for several years. In *The Omega Point* (2010), Strieber wrote:

I will never forget the ghastly shock that coursed through me a few days later when my doctor said, "You've been raped." It was so humiliating that it took me twenty years to actually utter those words. (Author's Note)

And in a number of interviews between 2010 and 2015, Strieber repeated the same statement. For example:

You know, it took me more than twenty years. It was 2005, I guess it was 20 years before I could actually say outright I was raped on that night. ^[72]

And suddenly I wake up in this situation, I had a nightmarishly difficult experience including a rape — it took me more than 20 years to actually be able to say that happened to me. ^[73]

Your doctor says to you, Whitley, you've been raped...It took me 25 years even to say those words to my wife, I was so humiliated by it. ^[74]

The suggestion being made by Strieber is that like many rape victims he was so humiliated that for many years he could not bring himself to admit to others what had happened. But the suggestion is baffling because Strieber was associating what had happened to him with rape as early as *Communion* itself:

Scoffing at them is as ugly as laughing at rape victims. (Prelude)

And in the very same paragraph that the rectal probe experience is described, Strieber wrote:

Apparently its purpose was to take samples, possibly of fecal matter, but at the time I had the impression that I was being raped, and for the first time I felt anger. (One)

One cannot help but think that Strieber's wife read *Communion*, including the part where he was straightforwardly associating himself with having been raped. Strieber would continue to unambiguously associate the abduction experience with rape throughout the years. In a 1993 interview he said:

So, as far as I'm concerned, the UFO community, which revolves around this black or white interpretation, literally has no idea of what's going on. They haven't even begun. The true encounter experience is a form of rape, basically. And I think because there is no viable cultural infrastructure to support the people it happens to and to control the ones who are doing it, (abductees) have to help themselves and make it into a transformative experience. Just as if a woman was raped and is just laughed at by her friends and family. That happens. She ends up in the same situation I was in. Two choices. Either she makes the rape encounter into something she can live with, she makes it something that strengthens her soul, or she falls into despair. I did both. ^[75]

And in *Confirmation* (1998) he wrote:

Powerful feelings are engaged when somebody comes face to face with it, that sometimes lead the witness toward a painful sense of having been raped [...] (ch 10)

Whether or not what happened to Strieber was rape, and whether or not he was subsequently victimized in the media and elsewhere, at issue here is clearly a certain narrative of victimhood and its construction, especially in the 2000s.^[76] After all, given that he was associating himself and the abduction phenomenon with rape as early as *Communion*, one might well ask how it was possible that Strieber could say it took him “twenty-five years to admit” to his wife he had been raped.

One starts to get a glimmer of an answer when one discovers the following in Strieber’s 1989 novel *Majestic*:

He could not tell anybody that he had just been, in effect, raped.
It was a secret he kept for forty-two years, until yesterday. (ch 20)

In *Majestic*, Wilfred Stone, a character with many noted similarities to Strieber, is manually stimulated to climax by an alien and concludes he has “in effect” been raped, a secret he keeps for decades — as Strieber would say years later using very similar language. But *Majestic* appeared only two years after *Communion*. There is a blurring taking place here between Strieber and a fictional character from twenty years before, further sign we are in the realm of narrative.

Strieber’s talking point that he waited twenty-five years to tell his wife he had been raped seems driven ultimately by a tendency of Strieber’s we saw earlier: Strieber being strategic. His decision to link his own abduction experience with the culturally inviolable place of rape victimhood was already apparent in 1987 where the word “rape” is used in the same paragraph in *Communion* as mention of the rectal probe, and Strieber has also been talking about rape more or less constantly since that time. The idea that Strieber was raped and in embarrassment and shame waited twenty years to tell his wife is thus not credible, particularly because it is a detail he put this into the mouth of a fictional character as early as 1989. Rather what the rape narrative represents is Strieber dealing in the cachet of the rape victim for strategic reasons through an argument of similarity while at the same time representing to himself his own feelings of victimization at the hands of others. This should be obvious given that the comments made by Strieber about being ‘raped’ are generally not directed in anger at the ‘visitors’ who ‘raped’ him, but rather critics, comedians, and so on ridiculing him. Finally, one might wonder how seriously one should take the ‘rape’ of a man who can say the visitors “raped the dickens” out of him:

Until finally, whatever it was and is that does these things, just dragged me out of the house in the middle of the night, raped the dickens out of me [...] ^[76a]

Strieber's feelings of victimhood, the failure of the *Communion* mission, and the end to his role as truth-teller and public intellectual to the culture at large taken together form the *sitz-im-leben* for *The Key*, a book of revelation from an otherworldly figure who delivers the definitive statement of Whitley Strieber's ideas from that period. And one can be even more precise about the context in which *The Key* arose. In June 1998 when the 'true encounter' took place, Strieber was getting ready to write a book with Art Bell under the provisional title 'The Edge'. The book was abandoned by Strieber in favor of *Superstorm* (co-authored with Bell) and after *The Key*. 'The Edge' was retitled *The Source* and written by Bell, this time with Brad Steiger, and released in 1999 with the same basic concept: a massive survey of all the 'edge' topics: ancient civilizations, alien abduction, crop circles, cattle mutilations, coming earth changes, ghosts, out-of-body experiences, and more. In fact, the book encompassed so many topics readers have complained of the sheer number in its Amazon reviews. In this context of Strieber already preparing to write a book that was a broad survey of these topics, *The Key* appears to be Strieber deciding to make his own statement about these phenomena. Rather than simply chronicling them, Strieber sought to unify and explain such phenomena in a broad scientific, philosophical, and spiritual vision of his own making.

Strieber has often bitterly complained that the intellectual culture has failed to confront such topics. But it could be argued that Strieber represents this very confrontation — in all its inevitable failure. Strieber is arguably *exactly* what one would expect from our intellectual culture as it is currently constituted when given the otherworldly as a problem: the Moses-leading-his-tribe-to-the-promised-land symptom combined with the desire-for-recognition symptom resulting in damaged self-worth and wounded feelings. In Strieber's case, the wounding and personal rejection seem to have produced to a 'true encounter' in which an otherworldly exemplar of human decency and kindness appears in order to confirm Strieber's own speculations, vindicating him on those points and, of course, simply by choosing him for the visitation.

That failure is also our failure. If Strieber had had four or five true thinkers to engage with in the late nineteen-eighties, his work post-*Communion* might not have been what we see today in retrospect:

an increasingly poetic and thinner set of ruminations till *Confirmation*, itself a last-gasp effort to insist he had the proof that the public wanted after *Communion* (ten years too late); then an explosion of clarity with *The Key* only possible on the basis of a profound self-deception, followed by some extremely uneven writing in novels, some so bad as to be unreadable.

The question of responsibility, however, inevitably returns to Strieber. Strieber in 2016 in *The Super Natural* can say: “I am almost pathologically honest” (ch 18). Certainly, Strieber has organized his personality in such a way that he is absolutely convinced of his own honesty. But as this paper has shown, with *The Key*, Strieber has involved his fans in an elaborate self-deception in which a ‘true encounter’ was constructed in order to confirm and validate Strieber at the deepest levels. To advance this self-validating fantasy scenario, Strieber was not above re-purposing concepts from his Gurdjieff ‘work’, borrowing from his friend Michael Talbot, gleaning from science news, even stealing from himself.

What can it mean when prisoners on death row are reading this book, taking solace from what ultimately is one man’s fantasy? According to a message board post, at least one death row inmate had been reading *The Key*.^[77] One wonders how much the book has been passed around, how many other men in the same desperate circumstances have been drawn in by its message. What measure of responsibility does an author bear who for reasons of wounded self-esteem pens a fantasy read by prisoners awaiting execution, comforting themselves perhaps with what may be badly mistaken notions of surviving death through meditation?

Determinations of moral responsibility are not within the scope of this paper. What is within its scope — and has been demonstrated — is that as an intellectual document *The Key* has no credibility. Whether or not any of the particular statements of the Master of the Key happen to be true, the origin of the book’s ideas lay not with an otherworldly man in a Toronto hotel who does not pay taxes, but with an unusually confused and emotional writer who sought to do what all of us do — convince others to convince himself. In Strieber’s case, since he was an author, he did what he was able: he wrote a book. He convinced his devoted fans of the reality of the experience, and interwove it into his personal narrative, always maintaining a certain ambivalence about the encounter since he could never erase all knowledge that the encounter originated with him. After all, when the Master of the Key said Strieber should go to Calcutta and worship at the feet of the first street urchin that he found, did Strieber do so? Confronted with a man who spoke

as God, some might have done. When the Master of the Key said in order to survive death Strieber would have to meditate, did Strieber give up writing and devote his life to full-time meditation? Some afraid of disappearing into the darkness of death might have done. Always the same silent ambivalence has been underlying *The Key* which has allowed Strieber to say “this is my great work”. How could a writer regard the transcription of another man’s words as his “great work”?

Given the ease with which Strieber could put the ideas of Gurdjieff into the mouth of the Master of the Key, claim he had never before heard that God was a hologram despite being featured in the book *The Holographic Universe*, as well as all the many errors and wishful thinking and false prophecies and so on in his work, one wonders if despite Strieber, his work does not in fact get precisely the amount of attention it deserves. That is, taken as literature, and Strieber as author and intellectual, what does it say of an author and intellectual when he does not know whether he has written or edited his own works? When he cannot recognize his own words in the mouth of a fantastic, fictive being? On what basis does Strieber continue to present himself to the public as the deep thinker of the close encounter phenomenon, a credible intellectual when as in *The Key*, there is such complete self-delusion combined with a demonstrable substratum of self-serving inauthenticity in his work?

And what does one now do with Strieber’s close encounter narratives? A useful distillation of those experiences was given by Strieber on his *Solving the Communion Enigma* website:

It’s quite easy to communicate with them. When I had close encounters, I would often simply ask questions aloud. Usually, the answers would be in the form of vivid pictures in my mind. Sometimes, words I heard as if projected into my head. On rare occasions, spoken words. Two spoken responses were: To the question, what would help me the most, the spoken answer was “Have joy.” To the question, do human beings have souls, the spoken answer was “Not all.” ^[78]

It is as if inadvertently Strieber has given us the two axes of his close encounter experiential grid. The ‘have joy’, of course, invokes the whole Catholic problematic that Strieber uses to frame his experiences, with emphasis on Meister Eckhart. All of the concern with ecstasy, joy, sin, and self-will that one finds in *The Key* are taken from Strieber’s own Catholicism and from Eckhart.

The other axis of his experiences comes from Gurdjieff, who is already catholicized in the second quote. All of the emphasis from the ‘visitors’ on meditation and the whole menu of concepts Strieber claims to get from the visitors seems to come out of Gurdjieff and the Gurdjieff work. One can see it in Strieber’s 2006 novel *The Grays*. According to Strieber, *The Grays* was written in order to tell new truths about the ‘grays’ not possible to tell in non-fiction. Strieber said variously that it was because of blocks on his conscious mind that he was unable to say certain things directly, and also that the process of writing fiction uniquely dredged up unconscious and repressed material.^[79]

But when the fundamental new fact about the ‘grays’ in Strieber’s book is that they are said to organize themselves into triads, should not one be suspicious? Strieber wrote in a *Journal* entry announcing his book:

My initial contacts were with the Grays. These people were not androids or robots. They were complex, richly alive beings who were obviously incredibly and totally different from us. As you will see in the book, I learned from observation that they function in groups of three, which I call triads.^[80]

And the triads are not simply trios. In *The Grays*, they are organized into positive, negative, and reconciling à la Gurdjieff:

The Two, as the negative pole of the triad, showed her a long needle. Her eyes widened as she saw the silver of it appearing out of the dark that surrounded her. She could not see the Thieves, of course, they were too careful for that. (*The Grays*, Four)

As Strieber himself would later write in *The Super Natural*:

In one of my novels, *The Grays*, the aliens are divided into triads, with one always advocating action, the second warning of danger, and the third reconciling the ideas of the other two and moving the triad forward. This is because close encounters so often begin with a triangle of stars crossing the sky.

Grouping by threes is an important part of the way the visitors present themselves to us, and I noticed from the beginning that my relationship with them was structured around ideas that I had learned in the Gurdjieff Work, most particularly, a method of meditation that facilitated communication with them. (ch 6)

Of course, how it is that a “triangle of stars crossing the sky” leads to the conclusion that the Grays organize themselves into Gurdjieffian triads is unknown. But it is worth noting that when Gurdjieff in his *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* (1950) describes the aliens on the planet Purgatory, like Strieber’s ‘grays’, his aliens are outwardly sexless and organize themselves into positive, negative, and neutralizing triads.^[81]

Another of the distinguishing characteristics of the ‘grays’ according to Strieber is that they are also ‘awake’ in the Gurdjieffian sense:

I remained with the foundation until 1983, when it became clear to me that friction that was developing between me and some of the leadership was being generated by me, because of a deep need to leave and challenge my own ability to sustain my inner work on my own. Between 1983 and 1985, I continued occasional meetings with Jean Sultzberger and William C. Segal, who were dear friends in the foundation, much my senior, and whose mastery, so assured and yet so humble, seemed very authentic to me.

Then came the close encounter. In January, I went to William Segal and described the experience to him. He said, ‘fifteen minutes with them, fifteen years of meditation.’ I could not have agreed with him more. Even while I was with the visitors on that night, so lost in fear that my first title for *Communion* was to be *Body Terror*, I knew from the way they moved and acted that they were, in the context of Gurdjieff’s theories, ‘awake.’

If you meditate in the manner prescribed by him, dividing your attention between inner and outer life? forming what he called the ‘double arrow’ of attention? you become able to see when others are doing this as well. The woman whose portrait is on the cover of *Communion*, which I am looking up at now as I write, was without a doubt the greatest master I have ever known. Her being projected devastatingly powerful knowledge. A great part of the terror that I knew when I was with her came not from the situation, but from how it felt to be seen by her.^[82]

Viewed alongside other close encounter accounts, it seems undeniable that Strieber’s own Gurdjieffian background strongly informs statements he presents as facts about the ‘grays’. The same Gurdjieffian commitment is visible everywhere in his work. In *The Secret School*, for example, Strieber organizes the book into three triads of three ‘lessons’ each. Unfortunately, the first five chapters do not contain any actual les-

sons. It is only in the sixth chapter of the book that Strieber is introduced to the circle of children and the secret school proper. Likewise, Strieber frequently tells the story of the ‘nine knocks’ said to have occurred in three sets of three. But he frequently neglects to mention that according to his original account there was a tenth ‘double-knock’, which could therefore be taken as ten or eleven knocks in total.^[83] Strieber’s willingness to use anything and everything in the creation of a meaningful encounter narrative, usually the most fantastic and yet spiritual possible, seems to have no limits. Even the name ‘visitors’, which Strieber has always presented as an sophisticated choice made to preserve ambiguity, appears to be an unconscious plagiarism of the name of another set of feral aliens from the television show ‘V’ which aired for two years just prior to Strieber’s *Communion*.

The three-dimensionality of Strieber’s accounts, once gratefully accepted as providing deeper insights into these experiences, ends up appearing in light of the problems with *The Key* as nothing more than a function of a uniquely gifted storyteller’s art serving the emotional needs of the author. Strieber’s accounts appear now to have no more value, and no less value, than all of the other more two-dimensional accounts. Given the pervasiveness of the problems, it is impossible to take Strieber’s work seriously as straightforward representations or windows into actual experiences. The problem of imagination and confabulation and an author willing to passionately advocate for the plainly, demonstrably false (e.g. *The Conversation* as a transcription of a ‘true encounter’) makes it impossible. When an author cannot tell whether he has written his own books or whether he has revised them it must render suspect everything he has said. Whereas before to an ordinary open-minded person granting a possible reality to the contact experience, everything Strieber said *might well be true*, now following *The Key*, to the same person everything Strieber has said is *probably false*. After all, there are plenty of abductees who while also bearing signs of trauma still nonetheless do not display that maddening combination of imagination and confusion that Strieber exhibits.

It is difficult not to regard Strieber as a brilliant fool, a man who does not know whether he is coming or going. Starting by trying to convince us of the authenticity of his experiences, whatever their ultimate nature, he in the end convinced us that he is a storyteller. Desperate to convince us of his honesty, he ended up showing us he was willing to deceive us to deceive himself. Trying to lead us as the deep thinker of the close encounter phenomenon, he leaves a body of work that is

complete confusion. Strieber's work fails completely in what it sets out to achieve, namely, to be a credible, intellectually viable confrontation with the otherworldly.

In 2015, Strieber celebrated his seventieth birthday. Unlikely perhaps to produce any new landmark works, *Communion: A True Story* and *The Key: A True Encounter* probably form the bookends of Strieber's unique career. While *The Key* has had none of the cultural impact that *Communion* had, it is nonetheless the perfect lens through which to see Strieber's work as has been shown. Perhaps the worst consequence of this, at least from the perspective of fans, is that everything skeptics and debunkers accused Strieber of at the time of *Communion* has turned out to be true. Strieber is what his critics claimed: a fantasist.

As if any more proof were needed, consider the sad case of Anne Strieber, the author's late wife who died in August 2015. In an entirely predictable turn of events, not long after Anne Strieber's death, Whitley entered into 'contact' with her. Now Anne is co-hosting the Dreamland podcast with Strieber:^[84]

About 15 minutes into the show one of those wonderful, mysterious Anne Strieber Moments takes place when she says in the context of the discussion "Having a body is not the only reason you're alive." Listen to find out why she said it and what it means.

Further, in what might be regarded by some as a desecration of her memory, Strieber has restarted his wife's blog in which he channels 'her' words:

On August 17, 2015, a week after Anne's death, I concluded her diary. Since then, there have been many incidents which have seemed to me to suggest that her consciousness is still intact and her presence is continuing. In the journal entry I just did on Open Prayer, I said that I did not feel that I should start her diary again because the presence of the dead is such an open question.

In the past 24 hours, I have changed my mind. Or rather, Anne has. She speaks to me so spontaneously and easily that I am going to just have to accept that it's her. She says, for example, right now: "Tell everybody that I'm here. I'm right here. A lot of us are. A lot! But the body turns you toward the outside so you can't have relationships with us. You forget us but we don't forget you."

She wants this new diary to be about furthering the kind of

communication that we have, so I will do my best to make it that. “Tell them to be quiet inside for as long as they can. that gives us a chance to be heard. Try not to make up versions of us. Don’t use your imagination. Here’s a test: if you forget something--a name, anything--ask your dead to remind you. If what you’ve forgotten comes right to mind, that’s a good test.”^[85]

Anne’s message is vintage Strieber. She is concerned with the “body”, the problem of attention, the need to quiet the mind to receive other-worldly messages, and of course, the problem of imagination. There is even a helpful tip on how to distinguish between reality and imagination: it involves memory, and if you have forgotten something and ask the dead, should the answer come spontaneously you are not imagining things. One recalls Strieber’s success at ‘remembering’ the words of the Master of the Key.

Anne Strieber is now also guiding Whitley through experiences with the visitors:

Recently I had a very frightening experience with the visitors. It was intentionally induced by them and led to them backing off from a relationship that has recently become very much closer and is the treasure of my life. I was bereft, but this time I was not left in the dark about why I had reacted with such fear to what they did, or what their motives were. The reason is that I have Anne on the other side, and she offered what I believe to be an insight into the situation that is of fundamental importance.

She said to stop addressing them with my emotions. “Look at their presence here objectively. Our relationship with them is like a mandala of dark and light. They are the dark side, and it is in the dark that we find knowledge. Ours is the light, and it is in the light that they find understanding.”^[86]

The Anne of the afterlife is another version of Whitley, concerned with the relationship between dark and light, finding value in the former, and using Strieberian vocabulary (e.g. “objectively”). Of course, on some level Strieber is aware he is channeling himself. It is why he shapes his own language to make it seem less like his own:

I have certainly come to rely on Anne to remind me of all sorts of things. She had a marvelous memory in this life and

she still does! She says, “It’s even better now. You have no idea. Here, memories are things, colors and images woven into a living carpet that is the life you have lived.”

Here Strieber sidesteps a favorite term of his — ‘tapestry’ — to describe his classic concept of moments of human life living on outside of time, and instead opts for “carpet”. So doing, he creates a clumsy visual metaphor of human life as something on which people tread.

One has to despair on some level at the foolishness Strieber represents. But it would be just as foolish to assert that what Strieber has done is somehow qualitatively different from what everyone is doing all the time. Strieber is on a continuum of human beings doing everything within their power — including concocting the most exotic fantasy — to find meaning and make sense of their experiences. Paraphrasing the author of Ecclesiastes it may be said: “Delusion, delusion. Everything is delusion”. Strieber’s frantic and desperate desire to find meaning in his contact experiences in order to secure a place as public intellectual with his “new vision” of contact and to find value for himself is thoroughly human. After all, the desire to locate in such experiences a fantasy of transcendent wisdom is not limited to Strieber. Others, too, when they have gotten past the incomprehensibility of their experiences, settle on some basic meaning to them and write books.

The hopeful, hopeless desire to find in the otherworldly a source of transcendental wisdom is described in *Communion* by accident with such wisdom in its classic representation symbolized by an owl:

But I wanted desperately to believe in that owl. I told my wife about it. She was polite, but commented about the absence of tracks. I really very much wanted to convince her of it, though. Even more, I wanted to convince myself. So intent was I on this that I telephoned a friend in California for the specific, yet unlikely, purpose of telling her about the barn owl at the window.
(One)

NOTES

PART ONE

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [1] The company was named after two characters from Strieber's novel *Catmagic*: "Whitley's World News 3 January 2001" at: http://beyondcommunion.com/toronto/010103w_w_n.html

According to Strieber in "Q & A with Whitley Strieber: *The Key*" (26 Mar 2001 © Sean Casteel), he started Walker & Collier, Inc. after editing the *Hidden Agendas* series for Dell. Strieber wanted to release books by other authors as well as himself. According to the following website, the company was incorporated in 1995:

<http://www.manta.com/c/mm2l73y/walker-coller-inc>

- [2] This according to the now-defunct site beyondcommunion.com. The unsourced statement was located at the bottom of the page: <http://beyondcommunion.com/thekey.html>

It is not clear whether this printer handled all printings of the Walker & Collier version. See following note.

- [3] The book available for purchase in January 2001 may have been different than the book available in subsequent years. The first printing of *The Key* appears to have been done as 8.5 x 11" book with black plastic comb binding. The only difference between the initial 8.5 x 11" book and the more widely circulated 6 x 9" based on direct comparison is the addition of an ISBN box on the back cover of the 6 x 9" book in the lower right corner with ISBN 10 and 13 numbers. By rights the ISBN numbers should have been added to the copyright page of the 6 x 9" book but were not. The 2001 book at the 8.5 x 11" size had to be turned to the horizontal position (landscape) to be read with two numbered book pages side-by-side on each printed page. But in all other respects, the interiors of the two printings appear identical.

In a variety of articles throughout the years and in interviews in 2011 to promote the release of the Tarcher version of *The Key*, Strieber bafflingly gave 2002 as the year of the release of his own

original self-published version. One possible explanation is that Strieber was referring to the year the smaller 6 x 9" printing was made available for purchase. Otherwise why he would use this date is unclear.

The book was available for sale in January 2001 according to a variety of sources (see note 4). It was printed with a 2001 copyright date. According to a Library of Congress filing in 2011, the book was created in 2000 and copyright 2001.

- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20010203152900/http://whitleysworld.com/thekey.html>

Strieber talked about *The Key* being already available for sale in an interview on **Clear Talk with Constance Clear**, KENS Radio AM 1160 San Antonio dated 12 Jan 2001.

On February 7, 2001, Strieber announced on **Coast to Coast AM with Art Bell** that his new website, unknowncountry.com, was up for the first time that day. The websites whitleysworld.com and strieber.com, he said, now redirected to unknowncountry.com. *The Key*, Strieber said, was available for sale.

THE SCENARIO

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [5] According to the calendar, June 6, 1998, was a Saturday. On page 78 (W&C) Strieber says it "was a Saturday morning" when he woke up to leave the hotel. Strieber often says the event took place on the 'last day' of his book tour. It seems he considered the tour basically finished the previous day (Friday), though he has also elsewhere said that he stopped at at least one bookstore in Toronto before departing by plane.
- [6] Whitleysworld News 3 Jan 2001. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.
- [7] "Q & A with Whitley Strieber: *The Key*" 26 Mar 2001 © Sean Casteel
- [8] <https://web.archive.org/web/20010203152900/http://whitleysworld.com/thekey.html>

- [9] Excerpt from Whitleysworld News e-mail newsletter 27 Oct 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.
- [10] **Coast to Coast AM** 07 Feb 2001 [~32:30]
- [11] Excerpt from Whitleysworld News e-mail newsletter 27 Oct 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.
- [12] Whitleysworld message board 11 Oct 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.
- [13] Strieber has consistently called *The Conversation* a ‘transcription’ from his earliest pre-publication statements to the present day.
- [14] Whitleysworld News 3 Jan 2001. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.
- [15] **Clear Talk with Constance Clear** KENS Radio AM 1160 San Antonio 12 Jan 2001 – Transcript from beyondcommunion.com
- [16] “The Key, Part Four” Strieber’s 2003 audio commentary, [~1:45]
- [17] **Dreamland**, “The Censorship of The Key”, 21 May 2011 (available from 19 May). In the interview with Jim Marrs Strieber twice refers to his book as a “sacred text”.

EVERYTHING HE SAID WAS NEW
[\[return to section\]](#)

- [18] “Q & A with Whitley Strieber: *The Key*” 26 Mar 2001 © Sean Casteel
- [19] “This is not a designed work, fiction or non. It is a transcription of a conversation, and that’s all it can be.” “Q & A with Whitley Strieber: *The Key*” 26 Mar 2001 © Sean Casteel

From early on, Strieber regarded the ‘true encounter’ as uncommonly real among his experiences:

However, there could be a reason that this happened. I have begun my book about the lengthy encounter in Toronto that

took place in June of 1998. Unlike the recent event, the reality of this one isn't in question.

Whitleysworld News 14 Sept 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunication.com

[20] **Paratopia** 116, "Whitley Strieber - The Key", 13 May 2011 [-13:00]

Strieber has gone even further in his assertions about the accuracy of his transcription. In the questions-and-answers section of the book's promotional website, Strieber suggested it was 100% accurate:

As to how the conversation could have been transcribed. That was not difficult for me at all. I could have done it without notes really, they were mnemonics, nothing more. Although it is not as acute as it once was, obviously, in those days I had a good memory. As matters stand, I can still easily remember conversations I had with people 20 or 30 years ago. Remembering this one, to which I was paying such close attention, was not difficult. The words are probably verbatim.

<http://www.motkbook.com/questions-answers/>

[21] In the Western tradition, dialogues have involved non-human interlocutors in the past such as Philosophy (Boethius) or Reason (Augustine). These figures are regarded as allegorical, and their encounters literary stagings. There is no sign of their authors insisting that the conversations had actually taken place.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/medieval-literary/#Dia>

For this question-and-answer dialogue, *The Conversation* (Walker & Collier), Adobe InDesign gives a total word count figure of 19419 words. 16312 words belong to the Master of the Key, 3107 to Strieber or just 16%. Microsoft Word gives a similar word count of 19479 words in total, 16364 for the Master of the Key, 3115 for Strieber or 16%. Thus we can say that *The Conversation* heavily favors the Master of the Key, around 84% of the total word count consisting of his answers.

KEY POINTS

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [22] See Strieber's first audio commentary on *The Key*, "The Key, Part One" [~15:30]

THE KEY TEN YEARS LATER

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [23] <http://www.sgglit.com/press.htm>
- [24] <http://www.unknowncountry.com/news/embarrassed-your-archaic-phone>
- [25] <http://www.tarcherbooks.net/spring-2011s-hot-titles/>
- [26] *Whitley's Journal*, "Predictions for 2011", 14 Jan 2011
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/predictions-2011>
- [27] <http://www.amazon.com/The-Key-A-True-Encounter/dp/1585428698>
- [28] <http://www.amazon.com/The-Key-A-True-Encounter/dp/B0052T10KS/>

PART TWO

DIFFERENCES DISCOVERED

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [1] Throughout the controversy, Strieber confusingly refers to the Walker and Collier edition as the "2002 edition". This odd mistake occurs in *Journal* entries and in interviews. See Part One note 3.
- [2] *Whitley's Journal*, "The Old Edition of the Key was CENSORED, the New One is Not", 15 May 2011
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/old-edition-key-was-censored-new-one-not>

DREAMLAND

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [3] Program dated 21 May 2011, but available from 19 May 2011.

CHANGES

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [4] [~3:12]

- [5] [~35:30]

- [6] “The Key, Part Five” available from 1 Jan 2004 (?)

- [7] Mentioned in the *Changes* essay but not discussed here is the third place where Strieber reads out loud from ‘censored’ material: in “The Key, Part Four”, 20 Jun 2003 [~30:40].

Also not mentioned in the essay but discovered subsequently is the fact that Strieber quoted from ‘censored’ material and discussed it as early as 2001, less than two weeks after his book was published, though admittedly the difference is small:

Clear Talk with Constance Clear KENS Radio AM 1160 San Antonio
12 Jan 2001 – Transcript from beyondcommunion.com

WHITLEY: Ok. Before we go on with the story I want to read something from The Key. And this relates because this is one of the statements in there that made me think about the Knights Templar, originally.

I asked him who are you? Christ? Or a demon yourself? He said, “stop thinking this way. This is no longer the Middle Ages. Be objective. Remember that all of God is in everything. The whole of creation is the matter of God. Nothing is separate from God nor can ever be. Your sense of independence is an illusion so that you can take the journey of discovery. So also, no matter what you may call me, I am in God.”

This is a very messianic idea, and a very Templar idea. Now let’s go back to who they were, and how they may relate to this in an unusual way. [...]

- [8] Will 2003 be the Year of the Alien?
Whitley’s Journal 26 Oct 2002

One of the strangest close encounter descriptions I ever received came from somebody who was walking in the woods when a little creature dressed in dark blue came out of a cave. He said that he was a rebel, and wanted to let the truth be known. The truth was that there had been a war between advanced civilizations on Earth and Mars many millennia ago. Earth had wrecked Mars, but Mars had gained control over our souls. They had condemned us to a perpetual cycle of rebirth and forgetting, of rising and falling civilizations, of always losing track with our past, going on and on forever. They called our world 'Dead Forever.'

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/will-2003-be-year-alien>

Cosmic War in the Past

Dreamland 26 Jan 2008 – Joseph Farrell

[~8:20] Shortly after I published *Communion*, I received a letter from a woman who had been walking in the woods with her son. And she said that a man, a little man in a blue uniform, a tiny figure had come out of a cave in these woods and said to her that he was a rebel. And that the people of earth had lost a war many thousands of years ago, that this war had involved a great destruction in our solar system, and that the war had been between Earth and Mars. And that Mars had lost its ability to support life. But the Martians had not lost the war. That they had in fact captured our souls. And they kept us in a state of perpetual reincarnation. And in their language the word for our planet was 'dead forever'. We would continue to incarnate into the physical forever. And he said he felt this was wrong, and that we should be released.

Why do Members of the Power Elite want Us Dead?

Subscriber special 26 Jun 2014 – Jim Marrs

[~26:50] I've often wondered if it might be a little different. What if we're quarantined and these people are the ones who are interacting with our jailers — in effect, they are the ones who run the quarantine and that's why we're kept in this helpless state. [...] [30:20] And I will never forget, and folks we're gonna conclude with this. A woman wrote me who'd been — this is

early on — she'd been taking a walk in Tennessee with her little nine-year-old boy. And she found this small dark blue figure came out of a cave in a forest. And it said to her, it said: I'm a rebel. And a great long time ago there was a war between earth and Mars. You stripped Mars of all life on its surface. But we captured your souls. And we forced you to recur forever on this wheel and you never get out of here. And our name for your planet is Dead Forever. Now, let's hope that's not true!

[9] *Is a War Between the Worlds Breaking Out?*

Subscriber special 24 Jan 2013 – Linda Moulton Howe

[~10:20] I'll never forget in the early internet relay chats about Mars, just after, before, the Internet. The internet was just beginning in 1985 when we started that conversation. One of the headings was 'Was Mars Murdered?'

Cosmic War in the Past

Dreamland 26 Jan 2008 – Joseph Farrell

[~1:45] Many, many years ago when I first was involved with the Mars face, when I sat in an apartment in New York City in 1985, in October of 1985 with Dick Hoagland looking over the old Viking photographs and looking at that face staring up from below, I joined a group of scientists who were then on a message system — this was pre-internet — where we were discussing what had happened on Mars. And this was long before all the lying and the confusion and the NASA nonsense, etc., etc., etc., and the changes in the Martian surface that have come to obscure those forms that were so clear in the Viking photographs. Now, one of the things I will never forget is one of those messages came up and it said: Mars was murdered. And the message referred to the D&H [sic] pyramid and that crater in the lower edge of it. And said that, this particular scientist said — who became quite a famous scientist, I won't mention his name because I think that he'd probably be ruined in the planetological community now if anyone knew that he had ever said this. In any case, he said that that pyramid had been entered by something that had come from the side. Not from above. In other words, it was not a crater, but something had penetrated

it, blown up inside, and caused the entire pyramid to collapse.

- [10] *Michael Glickman: Crop Circles, the Greatest Mystery*
Dreamland 16 Apr 2011

[~28:10] I knew a priest, a Catholic priest, and while I have like everybody who's Catholic — I have all kinds of problems with the Church. But he said to me, we were talking once theologically, and he said: this is a fallen world. And in a fallen world everything is backwards.

SINISTER FORCES

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [11] *Whitley's Journal*, "Sinister Forces in My Life", 26 May 2011
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/sinister-forces-my-life>

- [12] [~10:39]

COAST TO COAST AM

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [13] The track listings for *The Key* audiobook were formerly on Amazon. A fast and breathless read-through based on Strieber's own imitation of the Master of the Key's speech done by the present author and a partner with no breaks or pauses between lines took two hours and ten minutes.

- [14] <https://web.archive.org/web/20010420035026/http://www.whitehallprinting.com/FAQpp.html>

- [15] **Clear Talk with Constance Clear** KENS Radio AM 1160 San Antonio
 12 Jan 2001 – Transcript from beyondcommunion.com

WHITLEY: Oh yeah, well you know, you have a love hate relationship with your books. As soon as I opened it I found typos.

CONSTANCE: Oh no.

WHITLEY: But, um, minor typos I might add. Because the fun part of this book was in this sense: It's published by my own company and the cover design was by Louis Steiner, my web

master who is a good friend, and I set the type myself. So it's a real labor of love. I wanted this really very close to me. I couldn't see giving it to my publisher because they would want to come back and edit it. And the man said what he said. I can't edit it. It's uneditable. You have to just go with what was there. And I was sure that people would not understand some of it, they would want some of it to be changed, so I published it myself.

[...]

WHITLEY: Thanks. I chose the type and it was really fun, I mean for a writer to get involved in this level of it is very fun. To actually be sitting there and doing that typesetting on the computer. I mean I hasten to add I wasn't sitting in a little room with lead type...

[laughter]

WHITLEY: ...I was sitting at a computer with PageMaker. But it was as close to that experience as you can get in modern times. It was fun.

- [16] The 'censored' Walker & Collier was being given away to new subscribers in February 2012.

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/news/new-subscribers-get-collectors-item-original-key>

PART THREE

PROBLEMS WITH THE SCENARIO

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [1] For general information, see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiographical_memory#Temporal_components

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flashbulb_memory#Stability_over_time

- [2] Strieber has been fairly consistent on this point. Comments from his whitleysworld.com site in 2000 reprinted by the now-defunct beyondcommunion.com suggest he did not begin serious work on

the book until the second half of 2000:

Whiteysworld News 14 Sept 2000:

I have begun my book about the lengthy encounter in Toronto that took place in June of 1998. Unlike the recent event, the reality of this one isn't in question. It was with a human being who possessed incredible knowledge, and who appeared almost magically in my hotel room at three in the morning. I was wide awake. I took notes.

Likewise in a 2011 interview, (**Paratopia** 116, "Whitley Strieber: The Key", 13 May 2011 [~12:20]), he said:

I did try to blow it off for two years after I arrived home the next afternoon. For two years I didn't write a word down. I just had those notes stuck in a drawer and I didn't want to deal with it.

And in the Tarcher Introduction:

So perhaps my initial refusal to accept that the Master of the Key was real, the delay of two years before I actually even transcribed the conversation, and my long hesitancy about publication, have actually been governed by the grandfather paradox.

- [3] *Whitley's Journal*, "Encounter of June 6, 1998", 20 Jul 1998
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/encounter-june-6-1998>

- [4] Strieber on the language used by the Master of the Key and its effects:

Spooky Southcoast, "Whitley Strieber", 28 May 2011 [~9:10]

What the man said, a lot of the material is really extremely subtle. On the surface it's perfectly straightforward. But a lot of the things that he said have resonance, lots of multi-dimensional resonances and depth.

Dreamland, "The Censorship of The Key", 19 May 2011 [~35:45]

I wracked my brain for a long time trying to remember what he said about monsters in the world of the dead. I know he said something. But I just can't capture it. I can capture it in images, but not in words. And there were a lot of things — a lot of things that happened that night, there were sounds he made that I couldn't interpret that seemed to be connected somehow to words. It was a real hyperdimensional experience in many ways, let me put it that way.

- [5] <https://web.archive.org/web/20010124114300/http://www.21stcenturyradio.com/cni-scidebextra.html>

- [6] In the Afterword to the Tarcher, Strieber writes:

As I rose from the bed, I saw my yellow notepad on the floor, covered with scrawls. It had been in my briefcase when I went to bed, so I must have pulled it out and taken notes. I grabbed it and looked at them.

And in this interview Strieber says:

Spooky Southcoast “Whitley Strieber” 28 May 2011 [~20:20]: “I had taken a few sort of sciggly notes that I had there lying on the floor.”

- [7] *Whitley's Journal*, “The June 6, 1998 Experience: Update”, 1 Nov 1998
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/june-6-1998-experience-update>
- [8] <https://web.archive.org/web/20040905061332/http://seancasteel.com/toronto.htm>
- [9] See for example **Paratopia** 116, “Whitley Strieber: The Key”, 13 May 2011 [~22:45]: “The man was extremely happy. He was joyous in a way that makes you want to sing even to remember it after all these years.”
- [10] “The Key, Part Six” [~7:55] “5’6 or 5’7”
“The Key, Part One” [~1:12] “5’7 perhaps, 5’8 maybe”

The precise dates of these audio commentaries are no longer available since the unknowncountry.com website revamped itself, using a generic January 1, 2004, date for a number of files. According to an archived news page, “The Key, Part Four” audio commentary was posted 20 Jun 2003. The preceding three appear to have been posted sometime in 2003, with the remaining three (parts five, six, and seven) in 2004.

[11] Tarcher, Introduction

PART FOUR

PROBLEMS WITH *THE CONVERSATION*

[\[return to section\]](#)

[1] In a question-and-answer section on the promotional website for *The Key*, Anne Strieber wrote:

A. This is Anne. He called me the next morning and said he'd had an amazing meeting with a man who seemed to know the future. Then he said that he was going to write it all out on the plane home, and also that I should always remind him of this call whenever he decided that the man didn't exist. We both knew that he likes to blow off his strange experiences. He wants a 'normal' life. When he came in he hadn't written anything down. He said he had some notes. But he did nothing about it for years except try from time to time to track the man down. Finally, he took out the notes and started transcribing from them. It was only a single page of a legal pad, and I didn't see how the notes related to anything. But they worked for him. As far as the event occurring, I believed him implicitly. He was not making anything up at all.

<http://www.motkbook.com/questions-answers/>

Strieber also says his notes consisted of a page in his *Journal*:

What was so odd about this process was that I had nothing but a page of cryptic, seemingly irrelevant notes that I had taken

during the meeting, and yet I was able to remember, just by looking them over from time to time, all the details of what was said.

Whitley's Journal, "The Majesty of The Key", 20 Sept 2005
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/majesty-key>

- [2] **Coast to Coast AM** with George Knapp, 19 Jun 2011, hr 2 [-12:30]

THE MISSING GURDJIEFF

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [3] It is impossible to fully separate Gurdjieff from Ouspensky in the latter's *In Search of the Miraculous*. However accurate Ouspensky was in his book, what we get of Gurdjieff always comes through the filter of Ouspensky with Gurdjieff the man viewed through Ouspensky's eyes and Gurdjieff's words presented by Ouspensky in the form of hearsay. For this reason, I will often use the invented hybrid name of Gurdjieff-Ouspensky as source for Strieber's ideas when they appear to derive from *Miraculous*. I will use the name Gurdjieff alone when referring to the Gurdjieffian body of teachings more generally. It is important to note that for all Strieber borrows from Gurdjieff in *The Conversation*, Strieber's Gurdjieffian outlook is distinctly his own. He is not a doctrinaire Gurdjieffian as likely shown by the fact of his exit from the New York group. Gurdjieff's ideas appear often to be adapted-for-purpose by Strieber. But however much the Gurdjieff in Strieber's work is simply Strieber's own version of him, the important point is that the origin of the ideas is not with the Master of the Key.
- [4] Strieber's involvement in the Gurdjieff work in New York seems to have begun in 1970, with Strieber ending full involvement around 1983. In some accounts, he has said he was still involved, if distantly, from 1983 until 1985 when his association with the New York group finally stopped. Strieber has given two or three different reasons why his participation in the group ended. See Winter's 1985 *Faces of Fear* interview and Conroy's *Report on Communion* for the suggestion that Strieber may have been introducing too many non-Gurdjieffian ideas into the 'work', thus leading to his ouster.

- [5] The term ‘anxiety of influence’ was first introduced into literary criticism by Harold Bloom, who theorized that poets employ a variety of strategies to deal with the ‘anxiety’ of the knowledge that their work is not wholly original and that they are indebted to greater or lesser extents to past poets.
- [6] Strieber credits Buckminster Fuller for this notion countless times in his writings and in interviews. For example in this *Journal*:

Another part of the preparation was my involvement in the Gurdjieff Foundation, where I learned about two fundamental and universal laws, the Law of Three that is the key to harmony, and the law that Buckminster Fuller called “the building block of the universe” and the Law of Seven that is the law of progression across gaps via the use of shocks.

Whitley’s Journal, “New Thoughts”, 10 Sept 2005

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/new-thoughts>

- [7] Fuller ridicules the notion of a ‘building block’ often in his writings. For those interested in what might be regarded as a true anti-synchronicity, here is Fuller in the first chapter of *Critical Path*:

This concept and Darwin’s single-cell concept fitted neatly into humanity’s propensity for looking for “THE building block of the Universe” — people’s imagination is childishly stimulated at the idea of finding “THE KEY.” Spontaneously, we are simplistically inclined — it feeds the ego. “Oh, boy! If I had the key — what couldn’t I do?” (7)

In her 1986 *A Fuller Explanation*, Amy Edmondson, who studied under Fuller and who wrote the first major academic study on Fuller, puts Fuller’s view concisely:

There is no single building block of Universe. (179)

We must abandon our building-block concept of structure in favor of comprehensive solutions which take advantage of the inherent qualities of tension and compression. (249)

In fact, the closest thing to a ‘building block’ in the ordinary sense for Fuller was the tetrahedron. But the final, most fundamental concept in his work appears to have been a left-handed and right-handed complementarity that generated space.

It is worth noting that this kind of factual error occurs regularly in Strieber’s work. For instance, for many years Strieber has been lovingly offering up the exhortation from Meister Eckhart that we should all become as a “clear glass through which God can shine” (e.g. Afterword to *The Key*). But this phrase appears nowhere in English-language translations of Meister Eckhart including the Blakney which Strieber has in the past cited. Further, according to the Meister Eckhart Society, the quote does not belong to Eckhart and cannot belong to Eckhart because in Eckhart’s time clear, colorless glass did not exist. (The line is instead traceable to a certain William Wisheart centuries later.)

- [8] It is interesting that the Master of the Key not only uses Gurdjieffian terminology, putting him very close to Strieber intellectually, but the idiosyncratic terminology of the New York group of which Strieber was a part. Strieber dedicated his book *The Path* to Jeanne de Salzmann, among others, from his Gurdjieff group. De Salzmann preferred the term ‘reconciling’ to ‘neutralizing’, as for example, in her posthumously-published book *The Reality of Being*:

But two forces alone are not enough. They are not related. A third, reconciling force needs to appear, a certain feeling that allows a relation and thus transforms everything. (71)

- [9] See the document *Notes on Ouspensky’s In Search of the Miraculous* for a fuller treatment.
- [10] See chapter 1 in *ISOM*. The version of Gurdjieff relied on here is taken from Ouspensky.
- [11] Using concordance software, one finds “machine” used thirty-four times, “machines” thirteen times.

Apart from words like ‘the’, the word most often used is: ‘God’. It appears some 143 times.

- [12] “The Key, Part Two” audio commentary [~17:30]

- [13] Two sites selected at random:

<http://www.camino4.es/en/gurdjieff-4th-way/85-sensation-of-oneself>

http://www.endlesssearch.co.uk/exercises_sensing.htm

- [14] “The Key, Part Three” audio commentary [~23:10]

- [15] *The End of the Line* with Jeff Rense, 3 Jan 1997 interview for *The Secret School*, 2nd hour [~33:30]

- [16] *A New Model of the Universe*, Chapter Two: The Fourth Dimension

- [17] *Whitley’s Journal*, “Encounter of June 6, 1998”, 20 July 1998
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/encounter-june-6-1998>

- [18] “Whitley Strieber And The Toronto Experience” © 1998 Sean Casteel

- [19] **Coast to Coast AM** 27 July 1998

- [20] “Whitley Strieber And The Toronto Experience” © 1998 Sean Casteel

- [21] “Whitley Strieber: Toronto Encounter Alters His Perspective On “Visitors” and Coming Catastrophe”, Michael Lindemann, CNI News, August 5, 1998

- [22] Point made by unknown author:

<https://wmjas.wordpress.com/2009/05/25/saint-sernin-basilica-the-tarot-of-marseilles-and-whitley-strieber/>

<http://www.tarothermeneutics.com/classes/articles/relatedstrieber.pdf>

- [23] See Jeanne de Salzmann’s *The Reality of Being: The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff* (Boston, MA: Shambala Publications, 2010), 236

STRIEBER'S HOLOGRAM: MICHAEL TALBOT

[\[return to section\]](#)

[24] <http://www.rense.com/general69/holoff.htm>

EVERYTHING HE SAID WAS NOT NEW

[\[return to section\]](#)

[25] Ed Conroy, *Report on Communion: The Facts Behind the Most Controversial True Story of Our Time* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1989), 84-87

[26] Quoted in Conroy, 86

[27] "Conference with Whitley Strieber", Compuserve New Age Forum, 19 Jun 94
<http://www.v-j-enterprises.com/whitcis.html>

[28] *The End of the Line* with Jeff Rense, 3 Jan 1997 interview for *The Secret School*, 1st hour [~22:50]

[29] *The End of the Line* with Jeff Rense, 3 Jan 1997 interview for *The Secret School*, 2nd hour [~12:25]

[30] "Interview with Whitley Strieber: *The Secret School*" © 1997 Sean Casteel

[31] "The Key, Part One" audio commentary [~18:55]

[32] "Whitley Strieber Discusses *The Communion Letters*" © 1997 Sean Casteel

[33] Conroy, 340-341

[34] <http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/social-engineering-and-persecution-ufo-and-close-encounter-witnesses>

[35] *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (Madras, India: Vedanta Society of Southern California, 1953), 80
<http://estudentavedanta.net/Yoga-Aphorisms-of-Patanjali.pdf>

- [36] skeptictank.org/files/mys4/oprah.htm

Communion had been available for around four months at the time of this media appearance. Surprisingly, no question is put to Strieber about his alien encounters on the show and Strieber is simply identified as ‘author’.

- [37] As will be touched on later, Strieber was cracking the code of the Zodiac in *The Coming Global Superstorm*, deciphering the symbolic meaning of the various zodiacal signs. But that code-cracking was somewhat at odds with the material in *The Conversation*, and more consistent instead with material from early accounts that did not make it into *The Conversation*.

- [38] **The Agony Column Podcast**, “A 2012 Interview with Whitley Strieber”, 12 Mar 2012 [~37:28]

- [39] Dec 1994 email posted to Compuserve forum:
<http://www.v-j-enterprises.com/whitley.html#Harassment>

- [40] “Whitley Strieber Discusses *The Communion Letters*” © 1997 Sean Casteel

- [41] <https://web.archive.org/web/20120804045247/http://www.communionenigma.com/questions-answers/>

Strieber was also making the point in *Breakthrough*:

I also saw a thing that I had not expected, that not all souls persist, that the immortal potential is more fragile than we have dared to face. (ch 14)

- [42] See Gary Lachman’s *In Search of P. D. Ouspensky* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 2004). Ouspensky was strongly influenced by Hinton and, as Lachman points out, he translated several of the Hinton’s works. Perhaps Hinton’s most famous book was *An Episode of Flatland or How a Plane Folk Discovered the Third Dimension* (1907).

- [43] <http://www.v-j-enterprises.com/whitley.html#Sheldon>

[44] “Interview with Whitley Strieber: *The Secret School*” © 1997 Sean Casteel

[45] **Dreamland** 1995-11-19 [~3:30]

John Lear has separately stated in online forums that Strieber told him as much. Lear posted in July 2006:

The following is an opinion: if you go into the light, you go into the ‘soul catcher’ which can keep the soul for a time or sent it to a new born baby on earth. I don’t know what happens if you go away from the light. Many years ago in a very private conversation with Whitley Strieber he told me, “Whatever you do don’t go into the light.” Am I going into the light? Yes.

<http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread215767/pg2#pid2330726>

And from this thread in November 2011:

Whitley Streiber was the one who told me that ‘the light’ was a trick of the grays. He suggested that we not go towards the light.

<http://www.godlikeproductions.com/forum1/message1468214/pg127#28061269>

[46] “The Key, Part One” audio commentary [~36:45]

[47] “The Key, Part Two” audio commentary [~9:58]

[48] *Whitley’s Journal*, “The Reason for the Secrecy”, 25 Aug 2000

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/reason-secrecy>

[49] <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/whitley-strieber-4/majestic/>

[50] Feeding *The Conversation* into concordance software, one finds the interesting feature that the word ‘remember’ appears no fewer than twenty-six times. The Master of the Key is constantly telling the Whitley character to ‘remember’ this or that fact in support of a given line of argument or in order to refer back to a previ-

ous point in the discussion. But reading the discourse behind the discourse, what one sees with this unusual frequency is Strieber urging himself on during the composition process: ‘Remember...remember...remember’. Of course, by ‘remember’ he was telling himself to imagine.

- [51] “Whitley Strieber Discusses *The Communion Letters*” © 1997 Sean Casteel
- [52] “Whitley Strieber, *Confirmation Transcript*” © 1998 Sean Casteel
- [53] **Coast to Coast AM** with Art Bell 10 Feb 1998
- [54] “Interview with Whitley Strieber: *The Secret School*” © 1997 Sean Casteel
- [55] “Whitley Strieber Discusses *The Communion Letters*” © 1997 Sean Casteel
- [56] “Whitley Strieber, *Confirmation Transcript*” © 1998 Sean Casteel
- [57] *ibid.*
- [58] “Live Chat May 29, 1998 at 8:00pm ET (30 min)”
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010415180019/http://beyondcommunion.com/CONFIRM/980529.html>
- [59] “Whitley Strieber, *Confirmation Transcript*” © 1998 Sean Casteel
- [60] **Dreamland**, “Jim Marrs: The Fate of the Nation from the Founders to Iraq”, 27 Jun 2014 [~13:30]
- [61] “Conference with Whitley Strieber”, Compuserve New Age Forum, 19 Jun 94
<http://www.v-j-enterprises.com/whitcis.html>
- [62] *ibid.*
- [63] *ibid.*

[64] Strieber has told a certain lengthy story a number of times about a strange man who contacted him by telephone and warned him about the ‘grays’. Strieber tracked down the man’s location and it was a U.S. Department of Defense facility. Strieber has also claimed he was shown a photo of the man and that from the photo the man was clearly not human.

Here is Strieber beginning one telling of the tale at the start of a subscriber special dated 22 Aug 2012 entitled “War with the Grays”:

[0:15] I had a contact over the telephone — a 45-minute conversation — with someone I am convinced was not human. Was a blond. For a lot of reasons. Not the least of which is I could see where the person was sitting and what he looked like when I talked to him, while I was talking to him, in my mind’s eye. Very strange experience. This man told me the following story. He warned me about the Grays. He said that if you ever start a war with them, they will never let you lose, they will never let you win, they will never let you stop fighting. Ever. It will go on as long as you exist. And he said that, contextually, his voice was as sad as any I have ever heard in my life. And I thought to myself, he’s speaking from experience. This is where his world is. But now here’s the strange thing. He was one of these blonds [...]

Strieber also has written of the Blondes and their ability to travel here in a similar vein:

Another group who play an extensive role in the story are the blondes. I had a great deal of interaction with them, including a long conversation with one of them--physical conversation, which they can carry out easily, unlike the grays--during which he described his reasons for distrusting and disliking the grays in the most vivid terms possible.

He also said that we must not make the mistake of trying to fight them, or we’d end up in the state his people are in, locked in an eternal war that they can neither win nor end. He explained--and my life with the grays certainly confirmed this--that you have one chance with them, and one only. If you miss

the mark, that's it: mistake made, end of story.

In the story, the way that the blondes move between here and their home is depicted as accurately as I am able. They do not use or need vehicles at all. They use them for local travel only—say, within our solar system. For movement back and forth to their home, they use another method that will surprise you very much.

Whitley's Journal, "The Grays", 27 Jul 2006

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/grays>

- [65] "COMMUNION WITH WHITLEY STRIEBER: Interview by Leigh Blackmore and Keith Curtis". *Terror Australis* No 2 (1988).

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/23213635/Communion-With-Whitley-Strieber>

- [66] *ibid.*

- [67] *Whitley's Journal*, "Resurrection and the Tomb of Jesus", 6 Mar 2007

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/resurrection-and-tomb-jesus>

Strieber also refers to the triune brain expressly here:

Whitley's Journal, "A New Chance", 13 Jun 2008

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/new-chance>

And hints of Strieber's view appear perhaps as far back as *Communion*:

It was as if my forebrain had been separated from the rest of my system, and all that remained was a primitive creature, in effect the ape out of which we evolved long ago.

I was not, however, in the ape. I was in my forebrain, locked away from the rest of myself. My mind had become a prison.
(One)

It is worth noting that ‘three-brained beings’ is a concept that appears in Gurdjieff’s *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* (1950).

- [68] *Whitley’s Journal*, “The Millenium is-Well, It’s Here”, 2 Jan 2000
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/millenium-well-its-here>

SCIENCE NEWS

[return to section]

- [69] <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-06-018731-6>
- [70] “The Key, Part Six” [~16:35]
- [71] “The Key, Part Seven” [~18:45]
- [72] **The Unexplained** 196, “Whitley Strieber”, 9 Mar 2015 [~56:30]
- [73] <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21028161.600-united-plates-of-america-the-making-of-a-new-world/>
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/new-dating-panama-formations-cast-doubt-ice-age-origins/>
- [74] <http://oceans.mit.edu/news/featured-stories/big-cats-panama-armadillos-story-climate-life>
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1029/2007PA001574/full>
- [75] **Radiovalve**, “devslashnull and E23 in conversation with Whitley Strieber, author of Confirmation: Hard Evidence of Aliens Among Us”, [24:48]
<https://web.archive.org/web/19990128134745/http://radiovalve.net/interviews/strieber.html>
- [76] *Whitley’s Journal*, “What I Believe”, 12 Jan 1998
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/what-i-believe>
- [77] Strieber’s recovered memories of prophetic visions from childhood about Ben Bulben and the coming ice age are rendered suspect

when it is considered that he was writing in *Pain*:

Even a small nuclear war might touch off atmospheric changes that would lead to cooling short of “nuclear winter,” but intense enough to cause the one fatal summer of snow that could lead to a new ice age. After Kennedy’s death a famous Scottish prophet saw the snows spreading down from Ben Bulbin to cover the whole world. Other prophets have also seen snows.

[78] In *Appendix Three - Gaelic in Transformation*, Strieber writes:

One of the most interesting and unusual findings in *Transformation* is Leonard Keane’s discovery that the star language spoken by Betty Andreasson Luca when she was under hypnosis might have been Gaelic. [...] With Mr. Keane’s permission, I record here his glossary of the “star language.” All phonetic renderings are taken from *The Andreasson Affair* and were created by Mr. Fowler. I have listened to the original tapes and found that he did a careful and accurate job of transcription. (251)

But the line between who translated the text and who did not has sometimes been blurry. Strieber has at least once suggested he paid for the translation to be done, and at least once suggested he did it himself. This latter seems to bleed over into his wife Anne’s account:

When Whitley published *Transformation*, he wrote down some of the “star language” that Betty Andreasson had heard “aliens” speaking during her UFO encounter. Using a Gaelic-English dictionary that he found in a dusty old bookstore downtown that was going out of business, he translated it as “Children of the Northern peoples, you wander in eternal darkness.” This especially interested him because the Irish (whose original language is Gaelic) are famous for seeing fairies, elves and “little folk.”

Anne’s Diary, “Ogham”, 18 Oct 2011

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/diary/ogham>

[79] “Whitley Strieber on the Outbreak of Storms”, 27 Apr 2011

Strieber's April 2011 audio program for subscribers is an extemporaneous lecture on climate. Early on in the program he credits the Master of the Key for the climate change scenario he is warning his listeners about:

[~6:20] I remember very well when the Master of the Key spoke about this. There was a gravity in his voice. Mostly when he spoke to me, there was a joy in his tone. It was — kind of bubbled with excitement and joy. He was wonderful to listen to. But when he began to speak about climate change, his tone lowered and it became very grave. And now I know why. This is all happening just as he said it would.

But the Master of the Key never said anything about methane. Nor did he say anything about melting Siberian permafrost or giant sinkholes or other lurid details integrated into Strieber's 2011 climate change scenario. Nevertheless, Strieber describes these climate facts in the context of the Master of the Key's scenario as if they were predicted by him, explaining, among other things, that "[~7:20] methane is thirty times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide".

[80] **Open Minds UFO Radio**, "Whitley Strieber, The Key", 17 May 2011 [~45:30]

[81] In 2011, Strieber declared that this advance in computer technology involving nitrous oxide was bearing out the Master of the Key's advice:

It was not a joke. My research between 1998 and 2000 when I actually produced my private publication of the Key turned up a few hints that there might be something in his statement, but in 2005 a very specific discovery was announced, to the effect that reoxidized nitrous oxide could be used as a gate dielectric for charge-trapping nonvolatile memory. So he was right. Nitrous oxide will indeed "bear memory."

Here, unfortunately, Strieber is relying on the ignorance of his readers and is indulging in either ignorance or disingenuousness of his own. The 2005 'discovery' published in the paper by Kim, Kim,

and Seo amounted less to a revolutionary change in nonvolatile memory chip design than to a proposal to use nitrous oxide on a single layer of such chips. According to the paper, a wide variety of compounds are already in use as gate dielectrics. All such compounds by Strieber's standard "bear memory".

See: <http://bckim.gntech.ac.kr/MEE4124.pdf>

- [82] <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/258/5090/1861>
- [83] <http://www.math.utah.edu/~bresslof/publications/97-5.pdf>
- [84] http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1088/0954-898X_8_1_003
- [85] <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/13/us/three-americans-awarded-nobel-for-discoveries-of-how-a-gas-affects-the-body.html>
- [86] http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-4471-1599-1_153

STRIEBER AND THE GOSPELS

[return to section]

- [87] "The Key, Part Two" [~10:30]
- [88] Grateful acknowledgment to Dr. Robert M. Price. See his website: robertmprice.mindvendor.com
- [89] Strieber has drawn attention to this aspect of the Master of the Key's demeanor many times. See for example **Paratopia** 116:

[~22:45] The man was extremely happy. He was joyous in a way that makes you want to sing even to remember it after all these years.
- [90] "The Key, Part Three" [~19:18]
- [91] "The Key, Part Four" [~3:15]
- [92] "The Key, Part Five" [~10:15]
- [93] **Coast to Coast AM** with George Knapp, 19 Jun 2011, hr 2 [~8:10]

- [94] New World Translation:
<https://www.jw.org/en/publications/bible/nwt/books/matthew/17/>
- [95] “Whitley Strieber Discusses *The Communion Letters*” © 1997 Sean Casteel
- [96] *Whitley’s Journal*, “The Secret of Real Faith”, 6 Apr 2004
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/secret-real-faith>
- [97] A connection that cannot be explored here is the extent to which Strieber was influenced by Frazer and *The Golden Bough*. Strieber has referred to Frazer’s book more than once, for example, in his story *Pain*. Certain of Strieber’s assertions seem to harken back to Frazer, and his concerns about the similarities between Mithraism and Christianity may stem from there.

OTHER PROBLEMS

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [98] Levensgood was connecting crop circles with plasmas at least as far back as 1994:

<http://www.blresearch.com/published/anatomical.php>

Linda Moulton Howe was reporting on Levensgood’s research throughout the 1990s. Her 2001 book *Mysterious Lights and Crop Circles* featured an interview with Levensgood.

- [99] The two ideas merged in *The Key* — that crop circles are caused by plasmas and that crop circles reflect higher-dimensional geometry — appeared on a number of sites in the period. A selection:

<http://www.divinecosmos.com/start-here/articles/242-incredible-new-crop-circle-shows-hd-geometry>

<http://www.cropcirclesearch.com/articles/shapes.html>

<http://www.cropcirclesecrets.org/education.html>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090721054105/http://www.blresearch.com/>

[com/published/dispersion.php](http://www.cropcircleconnector.com/published/dispersion.php)

http://www.cropfiles.it/docs/Crops_Physics.pdf

<http://www.cropcircleconnector.com/anasazi/fringe2013b.html>

http://dwij.org/pathfinders/linda_moulton_howe/linda_mh9.htm

[100] https://books.google.it/books?id=ISjiAAAAMAAJ&lpg=PA24&ots=P_FD0dwhsu&dq=larson%20%22the%20great%20osiris%22&pg=PA24#v=onepage&q=larson%20%22the%20great%20osiris%22&f=false

[101] The *New York Times* article Strieber draws from can be found here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/04/04/science/the-core-of-the-earth-may-be-a-gigantic-crystal-made-of-iron.html>

Here is a link to an item from the following year announcing that the single-crystal core hypothesis had been ‘disproved’:

<http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/96legacy/iron.html>

[102] See for example:

<http://www.iflscience.com/space/mars-atmosphere-study-reveals-how-it-turned-habitable-world-dead-planet/>

[103] *Whitley’s Journal*, “Missing Time and the Future”, 19 Jul 2006
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/missing-time-and-future>

[104] This silly speculation — that the Master of the Key might have been Strieber from the future — rather fails when one considers that Strieber ought to have recognized his own face, even if aged a few decades. But Strieber has entertained the notion many times. In the Introduction to the Tarcher, Strieber writes of the Master of the Key coming from the future, saying: “In fact, I might even be him.” In at least two interviews from 2011, Strieber attributed the speculation to his wife. See **Open Minds UFO Radio**, “Whitley Strieber, The Key”, 17 May 2011: [~55:15] and **Night Fright**, “A Communion with Whitley Strieber”, 18 May 2011: [~36:05].

One gets the impression that this speculation is Strieber's way of coming as close to possible to admitting that it is he who invented *The Conversation* and the Master of the Key. With his saying he is the Master of the Key ~~from the future~~ one need only cross out a phrase for the basic truth to become visible. And when others, whether Strieber's wife or talk show hosts, gently suggest the idea that the Master of the Key is he, it is out of the recognition that the ideas in *The Conversation* are distinctively Strieber's without accusing him of making it all up outright.

PART FIVE

DATING THE TARCHER

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [1] Whitley's Journal, "Easter, 2002", 30 Mar 2002
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/easter-2002>
- [2] <http://www.unknowncountry.com/news/you-may-own-conscious-computer-someday>
- [3] From early on, Strieber appears to have been determined to see his 'implant' in a positive light, describing in various ways his attempts to put it to use.

The intrusive nature of the implant phenomenon worries me. I want to believe that this is all to the good, but it's not easy, given that this seems such a terrific invasion of privacy.

Whitley's Journal, "What I Believe", 12 Jan 1998
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/what-i-believe>

In a 2005 *Journal* entry, Strieber says he uses the implant as a tool and it allows him to travel to other worlds:

Another great event for me has been, as it has turned out, the placement of the implant in my left ear. The video of the attempt to remove this is already archived in the subscriber section of Unknowncountry, so you can watch it if you wish.

Looking back, I consider the doctor's failure to remove the little white disk that moved off into the tissue of my ear when he touched it with his scalpel as one of the luckiest breaks I ever had.

I have learned how to use this implant--at least, begun to--and I see it now as a tremendous and powerful gift, a technological device that has freed me from the bondage and illusion of space-time and enabled me to travel in realms undreamed.

It is not a mind control device, nor does it read my mind. I know this because I have learned to turn it on and off myself, and to begin to use it as what it is: a tool.

[...]

But I am not afraid. I can take it. Have taken it. I have stolen this fire that was put in my head, and will spend the rest of my life learning to use it and using it.

Here are some of the things I have learned to use it for:

1. Observe other worlds. I can lie down, collect my thoughts, gather my attention as I have taught in the meditation series in our subscriber section, and see rich, almost television-like images of life on other planets. Usually, I cannot see the beings, only their artifacts. Sometimes I can see them as well, but that's hard because it involves much more than just looking. There is a level of interaction that I am just now learning. The problem is that the contact is so personal and so startling that it backs me out of the whole process. But I'm getting past that.

Whitley's Journal, "New Thoughts", 10 Sep 2005

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/new-thoughts>

As recently as 2016, Strieber was writing that his implant is interacting with him in 'wonderful' ways and even allowing him to communicate with his dead wife:

I think that somebody who was capable of moving me out of my body and controlling my flight listened to that talk and responded. In recent months, my implant has been turning on

a lot, and all sorts of wonderful things happening as a result. I suspect that this is another one of those things.

Anne was always absolutely certain that the implant was a good thing. She was dead against my getting it removed and made me promise, after the failed attempt, to never touch it again. I'm glad that I made that promise, because, since her passing, it has been instrumental, I believe, in facilitating the rich communication between us.

I consider it a piece of technology that links different levels of reality, and every hour and every day of my life, I am grateful that it is with me, and so very glad that Anne's intuition was so accurate. We removed just enough of it to be certain that it was there, and for the doctor to confirm that it is a completely unknown object. The video of the removal attempt is hosted in the subscriber area of this website.

Whitley's Journal, "An OBE with a Materialization", 17 Sep 2016
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/obe-materialization>

- [4] Another reason to think that *Fragmentary Inclusions* represents early material is its mention of Helium-3. Helium-3 is not mentioned often in Strieber's work. But it does appear in two 'clusters'. The second is in 2006-2007 when it is mentioned in a *Journal* (www.unknowncountry.com/journal/war-dreamland) and in his novel *The Grays*. Before that it is only mentioned in his 1997 *The Secret School*. The earlier mention together with the discussion of *Hamlet's Mill* raise the possibility that the *Fragmentary Inclusions* may in fact be an early attempt to do a 'transcription'.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE KEY

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [5] Posted on Whitley's World message board 11 Oct 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.
- [6] Posted on Whitley's World message board 21 Oct 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.

- [7] Excerpt from Whitleysworld News e-mail newsletter 27 Oct 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.

- [8] Strieber's editor for *The Key* at Tarcher/Penguin, Mitch Horowitz, was kind enough to respond to an e-mail inquiry in February 2016. According to Horowitz, though his recollection was not clear, Strieber may have sent a PDF and later a Microsoft Word file. The latter, he said, is typically what they requested for the production process. Horowitz said that Tarcher did not edit the text except to bring it in line with house style. He added that Strieber may have edited the text but he did not recall.

WHAT IS THE KEY?

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [9] Excerpt from Whitleysworld News e-mail newsletter 27 Oct 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.

- [10] *Whitley's Journal*, "Crawling to Nirvana", 5 Oct 2012
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/crawling-nirvana>

- [11] *Whitley's Journal*, "The Mystery of the Blue Book", 21 Jan 2013
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/mystery-blue-book>

CONCLUSION

[\[return to section\]](#)

- [1] In the December 1986 *MUFON UFO Journal*, Strieber wrote a piece entitled, "My Experiences with the Visitors" in which he presented himself for the first time to the UFO world:

I am a writer, and I would like to introduce myself to the members of MUFON. I have had a number of experiences with apparent nonhuman visitors, and have written a book about this called *Communion*, to be published in April of 1987.

Later in the piece he wrote:

Before *Warday* I published four entertainment novels, among

them the bestsellers *Wolfen* and *Hunger*. While these were horror novels, I have certainly never been a believer in the occult.

https://issuu.com/disclosureproject/docs/mufon_ufo_journal_-_1986_12._decemb

One can only marvel at Strieber's 'honesty' here given that in 1986 he had already spent more than a decade doing meditation and studying the esoteric ideas of G. I. Gurdjieff, as well as experimenting with the Tarot, wicca, and so on.

- [2] In January 2015, Strieber announced that he had been working on *The Super Natural* with Kripal, the book his publisher was calling it "the most important book on the paranormal since Charles Fort published the *Book of the Damned* in 1919". Strieber read from his first chapter in a subscriber special dated 29 Jan 2015, "The Super Natural: a New Vision of the Unexplained".
- [3] In his *Mutants and Mystics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), Kripal repeats a number of questionable talking points from Strieber's narrative.

That Strieber's career was ruined by *South Park*:

His own publishing career was virtually ruined when a famous animated television show lampooned the anal-sexual dimensions of his visitor experiences and so destroyed his credibility with his readers. (327)

That Strieber was raped:

Whatever it was designed to do, it felt like a rape (later, he would have the courage to call it, without qualification, just that: "I was raped"). (309)

That Strieber is "very honest":

Personally speaking now, I read *Communion* as a most remarkable literary expression of a very honest, traumatized man, who also happens to be a gifted writer, struggling very publicly and

very honestly with a set of impossible experiences that can find no home in our present worldview and official culture. I also see a deeply moral man attempting to speak a set of very difficult truths about the soul and about the environment. (304)

- [4] In a story in *Texas Monthly*, Strieber called Kripal “the only person of any intellectual standing who’s ever understood my work”.

<http://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/unidentified-scholarly-subject/>

Strieber has also said of Kripal:

“I would say he’s probably the world’s leading expert on me, in fact”. Subscriber special “The Super Natural: a New Vision of the Unexplained” 29 Jan 2015 [~0:50]

“I have to tell you, I think he probably knows more about my work than almost anybody I have ever talked to”. **Dreamland** “The True Mystery of the Unknown” 15 Jan 2011 [~01:00]

Of *Mutants and Mystics*: “the best thing about my work that’s ever been written by anybody”. **Dreamland** “Mutants and Mystics, Dreamland’s 111111 Show!” 11 Nov 2011 [~12:30]

While Kripal’s work can be a pleasure to read, his scholarship is not without issues. Kripal asserts in a 2014 article for the academic journal *Social Research* that legendary French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) came to a “late-in-life acceptance of telepathic phenomena” (898). Kripal cites a piece by Derrida entitled “Telepathy”. His citation:

Derrida, Jacques. 2007. “Telepathy.” In Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume 1*, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, translated by Nicholas Royle. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

There are a number of problems with Kripal’s assertion. For one, Derrida’s “Telepathy” actually first appeared in February 1981 when Derrida was fifty years old and still had some twenty-three years to live. So a “late-in-life acceptance” is ruled out. While the

Psyche: Inventions of the Other volume did appear in 2007 just three years after Derrida's death, "Telepathy" had already been in print for some twenty-five years.

Second, and more significantly, while Derrida's piece is entitled "Telepathy", it is in no way a straightforward exposition of Derrida's thoughts on the subject. Rather, Derrida is doing what he spent most of his career doing: affecting a literary-philosophical pose in order to 'deconstruct' a given discourse, in this case, psychoanalysis. In the piece, Derrida writes as Freud, in a sense lampooning Freud's own "late-in-life" conclusion that telepathy existed. Derrida writes as if Freud's lectures and writings were his own, mixing in *The Forsyte Saga*, Plato, and more, deconstructing psychoanalysis by inhabiting and ridiculing Freud's belief in telepathy as a logocentric faith in the metaphysics of presence.

See: Kripal, J. "Better Horrors: From Terror to Communion in Whitley Strieber's *Communion* (1987)." *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (2014): 897-920. (accessed March 5, 2017)

[5] "The Key, Part Four" [~1:45]:

If I have done anything in this life at all that's worth doing it is the creation of *The Key*. And this is my great work. This is probably why I was born.

[6] [Confirm quote] Strieber has stressed the seeming normalcy of the encounter at the same time he has discussed its 'hyperdimensional' aspects. For example:

Coast to Coast AM 19 Jun 2011 Hr 4 [~14:40]

He just seemed so ordinary. I mean, he seemed like a regular person.

Spooky Southcoast 28 May 2011 [~30:55]

I didn't think he was an alien or anything while I was talking to him. [...] He still just seems so human to me. I can't believe he could be anything but a person.

PROBLEMS WITH STRIEBER

[\[return to section\]](#)

IMAGINATION

- [7] Paul Gagne interview quoted in *New York Times* excerpt from *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World* by Thomas M. Disch:

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/d/disch-dreams.html>

In *Transformation* (1988), Strieber tried to repair the damage done by his admission about the Whitman shooting in *Communion* and reversed his position, affirming that he had been on the campus that day:

I carried out an extensive investigation. I found that I was not registered in summer school on the Austin campus of the University of Texas, where the incident had taken place. Since I lived in San Antonio at the time, I needed a motive to place myself in Austin. Had I gone up to see friends? To take a test? That was possible; I was enrolled in a couple of courses by mail.

I discovered a reason for going to Austin on August 1. It was the hundredth anniversary of Sholtz's, a popular UT gathering place. Like hundreds of other students, I could have been up for the centenary celebration. If so, though, I thought that I would have been seen by somebody. I couldn't find a soul who could place me on the campus. However, I remembered seeing one friend, James Bryce, standing in the doorway of the student union during the sniper attack. He stepped back just as I ran forward and threw myself down beside a low wall. I asked Jim where he had been during the incident. He reported that he was in the student union and had spent a short time in the doorway. He hadn't seen me.

But I had managed to remember the exact location of another person who was there. Thus I must have myself been present.
(93)

Because of Strieber's tendency to retroactively inject details into his narratives, it seems very possible that he had previously heard that Bryce had been in the student union, perhaps even in the doorway. Then years later at the time of *Transformation*, he 're-called' seeing Bryce there as a way to support the idea of his own presence there. It is significant that Bryce did not see Strieber, and as shown, Strieber's account appears to be false for other reasons, e.g. the non-existent boy on the bicycle.

There is more reason to doubt Strieber about the Whitman shooting. On one occasion Strieber seems to have simply lied about whether he was seen. In November 1989, Strieber participated in a roundtable discussion with Buzz Aldrin, Heinz Wolff, and others on a UK television program called **After Dark**. Quizzed by several panelists about his experiences and his credibility, the issue of Strieber's Whitman shooting account was raised, and apparently succumbing to pressure, Strieber lied and said he had in fact been seen that day:

[~25:00] Panelist: Whitley, you have, again in the same book, admitted to untruths in the past about other incidents. Fantasies, untruths. You for a number of years apparently told a story about being present on the University of Texas campus when a sniper killed a couple of girls. In your book, in *Communion* you said it was untrue.

Strieber: Now would have I have said something like that in the book if I had been trying to create a convincing picture of myself?

Panelist: Well, isn't it paradoxical, because you may well be telling the truth. You have already admitted on other occasions for dramatic effect or for whatever reasons, you have told interesting stories about being an eyewitness to a murder by sniper, two girls on a campus. [Strieber: I was in fact there —] And now said your account of it was untrue.

Strieber: You didn't read the next book, *Transformation*.

Panelist: When you said it was true again.

Strieber: It is true. And I can — What happened after I wrote *Communion* was that people were telling me about things like screen memories. That a traumatic experience can be covered by a less traumatic memory. It's a commonplace. And I briefly, I suppose to escape from the actual and very horrible memories of the Whitman incident at the University of Texas, had all but convinced myself that that had been a screen memory. Because when I asked the people whom I remembered seeing at the campus whether or not they remembered me being there, they all said no they did not remember me being there. However, I later found somebody who had a fairly clear memory of me being there. And what bothered me was after I wrote *Communion*, that particular memory seemed so vivid, I couldn't convince myself that it was a screen memory. Finally, I found out actually what my motive for having been at the campus was.

Panelist: The trouble with screen memories though —

Moderator: Let's clarify the position. First of all, you were there, then you were not there, then you —

Strieber: I was there. After I wrote *Communion*, my faith in my own perceptions was sufficiently shaken for me to question whether or not these enormous events in my past were really what they seemed. And that was one of the ones I questioned. It's as simple as that.

Moderator: The form of your questioning was to say you were not there. Now you are saying you were there.

Strieber: I know I was.

Moderator: You were there.

Panelist: But that could be a screen memory. So I mean, in the next book, you can shift the goalpost. It becomes a little like Carlos Castaneda then because in the Don Juan books you tend to get an entirely different perspective in each successive revelation of the truth. Which I think is a thing that bothers people. Because if you do contradict yourself in a book then you can

provide a perfectly plausible explanation in the next book for the reason why you contradicted yourself.

Strieber: Why would I have contradicted myself if I wasn't trying to be honest? That's what interests me with type of line of questioning when it comes up. It's perfectly obvious what I should have done had I been making a hoax, is simply left the whole thing out. But instead of leaving it out, I put it in, and I put it in precisely because I wanted people to see the way in which this could derange one's memory of one's whole life experience. [...]

After Dark, 18 November 1989

<https://youtu.be/w7FfwyU7i-A?t=25m2s>

Conroy, in his helpful, if too-sympathetic *Report on Communion*, examines the question about Strieber's whereabouts that day at some length. Conroy found no one who saw Strieber at the scene of the shooting despite Strieber's claim in the **After Dark** discussion. It is one of the major flaws of Conroy's book that though Conroy quotes Strieber's mother as saying Strieber was in Austin that day but not at the scene of the shooting, and though he quotes Strieber's friend Jim Kunetka as saying Strieber had never quite been sure if he had been on campus that day even in the years before *Communion*, Conroy himself seems ill-disposed to critics like Budd Hopkins who point to the Whitman episode as sign of a possible problem with Strieber's reliability. Conroy fails to examine Strieber's accounts of the day in detail, and so misses obvious problem of the fictional boy on the bicycle.

- [8] Promotional material for *The Grays* at Associated Press:

<http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/Entertainment-LA-The-Grays-book/bcb6b113fa7b43f986ef1faa0cb967f5>

- [9] Autobiographical memory is considered on the whole to be reliable. While specific details can be highly inaccurate, people generally remember whether certain events have occurred in their lives or not:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiographical_memory

For Strieber, by contrast, autobiographical memory seems uniquely unreliable.

- [10] “COMMUNION WITH WHITLEY STRIEBER: Interview by Leigh Blackmore and Keith Curtis”. *Terror Australis* No 2 (1988).

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/23213635/Communion-With-Whitley-Strieber>

- [11] “Interview with Whitley Strieber: *The Secret School*” © 1997 Sean Casteel

- [12] **Coast to Coast AM** with Art Bell, 27 July 1998 [~2:45:30]

- [13] “The Key, Part Two” [~31:15]

- [14] **The Unexplained** 196 [~37:00]

- [15] **Paratopia** 116 [~22:45]

- [16] **Spooky Southcoast**, 28 May 2011 [~33:00]

- [17] “The Key, Part Three” [~12:20]

- [18] “The Key, Part Three” [~19:40]

- [19] “The Key, Part Two” [~23:40]

- [20] “The Key, Part Three” [~30:00]

- [21] “The Key, Part Four” [~2:40]

- [22] Excerpt from Whitleysworld News e-mail newsletter 14 Sept 2000. Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.

- [23] **Coast to Coast AM**, Jun 2011, hr 2 [~2:50]

- [24] **Night Fright**, 18 May 2011 [~52:45]

- [25] **Night Fright**, 18 May 2011 [~53:45]

SELF-SERVING

[\[return to section\]](#)

[26] **Dreamland**, “David Ray Griffin: Why The Official Explanation of 9/11 is Wrong”, 18 June 2005 [~10:08]

[27] **Dreamland**, “The Killing of Osama bin Laden”, 6 May 2011 [~17:20]:

I have some friends who were quite close to the Bush family. In fact, actually members of the family on the mother’s side. And I know that when he left office, George W. Bush was bitterly disappointed that he had failed to get Bin Laden.

Dreamland, “Jim Marrs Takes on the 9/11 Commission”, 24 July 2004 [33:30]:

Having been intimately involved in politics back in those days and when I was growing up, I was always, I felt like Watergate was a very minor affair compared to some of the things I’d seen.

Dreamland, “Whitley Strieber and Jim Marrs: Secret Knowledge”, 9 July 2005 [~19:45]:

You know, I know a lot about that. As soon as I saw that article coming up on *60 Minutes*, I knew Dan Rather was doomed. For a simple reason. I have a friend in Texas, a dear friend in Texas, who knows one of the National Guard officers who was present when George Bush’s records were destroyed. The very records that Rather said he had possession of. And they did not exist. However, the letter specifically from the general that Rather reported on was almost verbatim what I heard years ago was in those documents.

[28] For what is likely a more honestly-given account of Strieber’s conversation with Connally: Subscriber special “Why do Members of the Power Elite want Us Dead?” 26 Jun 2014 [~8:45]:

I knew the Connallys. I was one of the youth campaign managers for John Connally’s first gubernatorial campaign. And I sat in the governor’s office — I was in college at the time, and

one of the outcomes of the successful campaign was that I got a nice part-time job in the capitol in the legislative reference library where I basically sat with a bunch of other boys in the back in the evenings looking at the porn that had been collected by some legislative committee. [laughter] But in any case, we would go to Connally's office every once in a while when he was there in the evening and he would hold forth about politics and many other things. Unlike the Johnsons, the Connallys were nice people. John Connally was not a womanizing maniac like LBJ. So — when he was still with his arm in a sling, and was coming back to the governor's office, we'd go back there, of course. No one would bring it up. We were afraid to bring it up. But we always hoped he'd say something, I mean, about the car. Finally, someone asked him outright, 'Mr. Connally, what was it like?' And he said: 'Well, you know, there were bullets flying all over the place'.

- [29] **Dreamland**, "Col. John Alexander and Whitley Strieber: Every Secret Thing", 22 Apr 2011 [~11:30]
- [30] "Whitley Strieber Moderated Chat Compuserve, May 7th, 1998, 9:47 PM" Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com.
- [31] Whitley's World message board 11 Oct 2000. Retrieved from [beyond communion.com](http://beyondcommunion.com).
- [32] *Whitley's Journal*, "How to Aid the Tsunami Victims", 1 Jan 2005
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/how-aid-tsunami-victims>
- [33] See: www.dronehoax.com
- [34] *Whitley's Journal*, "A Most Complex Encounter", 11 Dec 2007
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/most-complex-encounter>
- [35] *Whitley's Journal*, "911 Five Years On: War and Illusions of War", 11 Sep 2006
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/911-five-years-war-and-illusions-war>
- [36] **Dreamland**, "Joseph Farrell on the Saudis, 911 and 28 Explosive

Pages of Documents”, 15 Jul 2016

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/dreamland/joseph-farrell-saudis-911-and-28-explosive-pages-documents>

[37] <http://www.unknowncountry.com/news/911-phone-calls-something-wrong-picture>

[38] **Dreamland**, “The Terror Conspiracy”, 21 Oct 2006 [~30:00]

[39] Strieber’s tendency to inflate his own role is visible in even small details. For example, in this transcript of 2001 interview promoting *The Key*, Strieber is corrected by the editor of the *beyondcommunion.com* website:

WHITLEY: Oh yeah I do. I like to read my books. Most of my books I’ve read myself. [Editor’s note: Not true, most were read by the late English actor Roddy McDowall.] Art Bell and I read *Superstorm* together which was a lot of fun.

When considering the problems with Strieber and his accounts, this tendency is at the heart of the matter. His sense of self-importance combined with his own deep satisfaction with his own intelligence co-mingles with the tendency to inflate his role in more trivial details and manifests in ‘experiences’ that highlight his own singular, even world-historic role. A telling episode along these lines is what he told the ‘visitors’ during one of his *Communion* abductions. Strieber certainly spoke from his ‘essence’ when he warned the visitors: “You’ll ruin a beautiful mind”.

If I had been afraid before, I now became quite simply crazed with terror. I argued with them. “This place is filthy,” I remember saying. Then, “You’ll ruin a beautiful mind.” I could imagine my family awakening in the morning and finding me a vegetable. A great sadness overtook me. I do not recall screaming, but evidently I was doing so, because I remember the next exchange quite clearly. (One)

Another instance of Strieber’s ‘candor’, he has been consistent about what he cried out during this episode. But in *Communion*, he couches his faithful report with material that does not exactly

follow. Strieber does not cry out ‘You’ll make me a vegetable’, or ‘You will ruin my mind’ but rather he is most concerned with how ‘beautiful’ his mind is, and that they will ruin it — the beauty of his mind.

This is borne out by an interview Strieber gave in 2009:

I told them they would ruin a beautiful mind if they did that. And it is. It’s a wonderful — I have a wonderful mind.

Veritas, “Chosen: The Abduction Special, Part II”, 26 June 2009
[~10:13] https://youtu.be/_4avrWuGXno?t=10m13s

[40] “Angels, Aliens, and Archetypes” from 1987 conference. Available in unknowncountry.com subscriber section.

[41] **Dreamland**, “Betty Andreasson Luca: Close Encounter”, 23 Apr 2005 [~31:35]

[42] *Anne’s Diary*, “Ogham” 18 Oct 2011
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/diary/ogham>

[43] Subscriber special, “Steven Sora: The Templars and the Master of the Key”, 16 Apr 2005 [~22:10]

EMOTIONALITY

[\[return to section\]](#)

[44] **The Agony Column Podcast**, “A 2008 Interview with Whitley Strieber, Part 1”, 16 Jun 2008 [~16:10]:

I think it’s my wife’s vision of me, Wylie Dale. I think I built Wylie Dale out of Anne’s response to me.

[45] Larry King is discussed, for example, in *Whitley’s Journal*, “The Anguish and Pain of My Rape”, 5 Aug 2009:

I will never forget the shock that went through me when Larry King laughed in my face. It was ghastly to be laughed at for something that terrible. Even now, I can remember the dense

odor of his breath, and how I almost vomited in his face. To his credit, he had me on his program a number of times afterward, and he gradually came to realize that I am no liar, and to sense that there was more to my story--more pain to it--than I was revealing to him.

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/anguish-and-pain-my-rape>

Matt Lauer is often mentioned by Strieber, always in the context of resentment at Lauer's 'sneering' or 'scoffing' at Strieber and Art Bell during their *The Today Show* appearance promoting *The Coming Global Superstorm*. That appearance can be seen here:

<https://youtu.be/7JDjz3-Q4vo>

- [46] Hodgman's 'TED Talk' seems to have been given in 2008. But it was evidently replayed on NPR in January 2015 when it came to Strieber's notice. Strieber complains about Hodgman's ridicule of him in *The Super Natural*:

As recently as January of 2015, the comedian John Hodgman delivered a Whitley Strieber rectal probe joke on the *Ted Radio Hour*. He framed it in the context of having seen the film adaptation of *Communion*. But prior to discoursing on the movie, such as it was, he was careful to deliver the identifying Whitley Strieber catchphrase, "rectal probes." He concluded his description of having seen the movie in a venue where it never actually played with the line, "Whitley Strieber was played by Christopher Walken. The aliens were played by rubber puppets."

The close encounter witnesses are among the last minority groups that can be humiliated without penalty. I curse my own ineptitude in having come up with that phrase "rectal probe."
(ch 18)

Of course, Strieber did not "come up" with the term rectal probe. It was in use in print many decades before *Communion*. Interestingly, if one does a Google Ngram view of the term "rectal probe", its use in print seems to reach its peak in 1995 before a steady decline. Doing the same Ngram view of the name "Strieber" shows a peak

in 1998 before a steady decline:

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=rectal+probe&case__insensitive=on&year__start=1940&year__end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct__url=t4%3B%2Crectal%20probe%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3Brectal%20probe%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Brectal%20probe%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Brectal%20Probe%3B%2Cc0

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=strieber&case__insensitive=on&year__start=1940&year__end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct__url=t4%3B%2Cstrieber%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3Bstrieber%3B%2Cc0%3B%3BSTRIEBER%3B%2Cc0

[47] **Night Fright**, 18 May 2011 [~50:15]

[48] [Confirm Anne Strieber comment about kitchen fires] Anne Strieber called her husband “clumsy” more than once: “Whitley is efficient, but clumsy” in *Anne’s Diary*, “Blue Pills, Blue Beads...and Seeing the Visitors”, 13 Aug 2014; and “Part of what I do is watch my clumsy husband lurch around” in *Anne’s Diary*, “Cheer Up!”, 6 Jun 2015.

[49] *Anne’s Diary*, “A Trip to Esalen”, 27 May 2010:

A woman named Vicky gave us a copy of her book, which is titled “The Secret Life of Puppets.” I laughed when I saw the title after I got home and was shelving our new books, because Whitley has, for some reason, always been TERRIFIED of puppets, especially those Charlie McCarthy-type “dummies” with clacking jaws. He’ll do almost anything to avoid a ventriloquist: Once on Fifth Avenue in New York, we once encountered a white ventriloquist with a black dummy that kept shouting racial epithets at the white people walking past (it was hilarious) while walking to our favorite bookstore. I turned my head to make a comment about it to Whitley and suddenly realized that I was alone: he had quietly and quickly gotten the hell out of there and crossed to the other side of the street.

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/diary/trip-esalen>

[50] [Confirm comment about being easily hypnotized] Strieber relives

his past life memories of ancient Rome and of being in the early Christian church in a subscriber special called “Whitley’s Past Life Regression” dated 15 Dec 2007. At one point, he is able to tell the hypnotist he is hypnotized and is able to follow the hypnotist’s instructions without needing to be told ‘1..2..3’. [~10:15]

[51] Strieber has likened himself to a “soldier” more than once:

Coast to Coast AM, 09 Apr 1997 [~37:15]:

I’ve known for a long time and my whole family has that we’re soldiers fighting in a war. And I can tell you right now that I expect to continue to fight until I can’t. Period.

Coast to Coast AM, 27 Jul 1998 [~1:17:10]:

[Bell: Do you have any idea why you have been chosen for all this to occur to you?] You know, I never think about it. I just — I’m like a soldier in a battle.

A more inclusive version of the characterization appears in the final chapter of *Confirmation* (1998):

A new world awaits, one that offers access not only to such things as the breathtaking propulsion system used by the visitors but also to age-old secrets such as whether a soul exists and, if so, then the potential to enter its world in a scientifically meaningful way. I suspect that we stand ready, most of us, to offer everything we possess to this effort. We are soldiers, it would seem, drafted into a war. Ours is the cause of a human future in the stars, and it is a struggle that we must not lose, for if we do lose it, then the glory that is the human mind will never be expressed fully and properly into the universe, and the goal for which we were doubtless created will not be fulfilled.

In a 2 Sep 2006 live chat for subscribers, Strieber wrote:

Whitley_Strieber: I have to do what I am doing. I signed on for this, and part of the agreement was that I would do a soldier’s duty.

Even during a past life regression, Strieber seemed to think of himself as a soldier. In a subscriber special called “Whitley’s Past Life Regression” dated 15 Dec 2007, Strieber is asked to contact his guardian angel and to describe his impressions.

[~26:00] She finds me really funny. She’s really amused by me. [...] Follows me and Anne. She’s also had relations...been related to Anne. And brought us together. Knew us both and brought us together. [...] She was not in the physical world when she did that, but she did. She is saying to me I remember too much and not enough. [...] It’s more serious now. [...] The seriousness comes from the fact that what I am is a soldier. I am a clever soldier. I am doing the ... clever soldier work. [...] What I’m seeing is planting seeds and getting beat up. For a long time.

STRATEGIC

[[return to section](#)]

- [52] **Night Fright**, 18 May 2011 [~37:10]
- [53] **The Unexplained** 196, 9 Mar 2015 [~31:00]
- [54] **Spooky Southcoast**, 28 May 2011 [~43:00]
- [55] *Whitley’s Journal*, “The Secret of Real Faith”, 6 Apr 2004
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/secret-real-faith>
- [56] **OffPlanet Radio**, “Whitley Strieber: The Communion Enigma”, 28 Mar 2012, Hr 1 [~13:00]
- [57] **Coast to Coast AM**, 27 Jul 1998 [~58:45]
- [58] *Insight*, “My Catholic Struggle”, 9 Dec 2011
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/insight/my-catholic-struggle-whitley-strieber>
- [59] In Conroy’s *Report on Communion*, Strieber’s high school teacher Brother Martin McMurtrey is quoted as saying of Strieber: “Well, he was always interested in the occult” (69). The mother of one of Strieber’s childhood friends said of Strieber and his friends: “They

were crazy about spaceships, aliens, and the whole idea of space travel. In fact, I remember having to take Whitley home in the middle of the night because he was afraid the spacemen were going to come and get him” (45).

[60] **Coast to Coast AM**, 28 Nov 1996 [~2:53:30]

[61] **Paratopia** 116, 13 May 2011 [~42:00]

[62] To explain Strieber, one is tempted to introduce a distinction between earnestness and honesty. Strieber is crushingly earnest, as shown by how painfully well-spoken he is and his presentation as a modest, compassionate man. But he is far from honest. This is the inescapable conclusion of a close study of his work.

TOWARD A THEORY OF STRIEBER'S WORK

[\[return to section\]](#)

[63] As to a political career, Strieber has said:

[~40:40] Because after all, prior to this, I was even being thought of politically very seriously by people. Because of *War Day*, *Nature's End*, and these books. They were wanting me to attempt – several people wanting me to attempt a political trajectory. That was ended by the *Communion* experience. Writing and publishing *Communion* absolutely brought it to an end. It brought all of my relationships in politics to an end. And I come from a political family, a democratic family that goes way back in Texas, all the way back to before the Civil War. And I definitely could have done something quite significant on the political front if I had been given the chance. This interrupted that. It marginalized me. Therefore I didn't get to do what I wanted to do. And maybe if I had, this world would be a different place. I don't know. (**Paratopia** 116)

As for joining the CIA, Strieber tells the following story:

[~13:45] The next year I was interested in the possibility of joining the CIA. I was a college student and looking for a career. And it was fascinating. They used to advertise in *The Daily Texan*

all the time. So I decided to recruit for this. And I went to the little office that they had and signed some forms and so forth and so on. My father then called me. You notice there's been no communication between me and my father about this. And he says, why would you want to do this, to join the CIA? And I said, well, I thought it would be interesting. And he said: well, it's not interesting at all. He was far as I knew a lawyer in San Antonio, didn't have any connection at all with the CIA. Then about a week after that I received a telephone call based on this submission of this application — could I meet for breakfast at the student union with a gentleman? I said of course, I was glad to. And this little, pinched-up man, chain smoking, you could smoke in places anywhere in those days, was there. And he told me basically that the CIA was a dangerous place for me to be, and I shouldn't try to pursue the application. And he wouldn't tell me why. And so I took that advice. I didn't know who I was talking to. I'd never seen this man before in my life. It was a very scary sort of situation. He was a pleasant man, but he was pretty insistent and it just scared the devil out of me. So I abandoned my application. I didn't join.

[Do you think it was Angleton?]

Well, twenty years later, I happened to see a picture of Angleton in the paper. And it was him. It was definitely him. Because that's an un mistakeable face. You don't forget that face. I reported all this in one of my books or somewhere. And Angleton's nephew wrote me, indicating that he was aware of the fact that Angleton had indeed had some kind of connection with UFOs. But there was something — what I'm telling you is only parts of a story, obviously, because I don't know the whole story. But it dovetails very eerily. Because my dad obviously had some sort of foreknowledge of the assassination. [...]

Subscribers special, "James J. Angleton, UFOs and JFK", 20 Sep 2008

- [64] One despairs after a certain point in finding anything like factual consistency in Strieber. For example, in *Solving the Communion Enigma*, Strieber begins the fourth chapter by writing: "In 1994,

Anne and I left our cabin in upstate New York for the last time”.

But here is Strieber in *Confirmation* starting his account of how an implant was forcibly inserted into his ear:

The night of May 24, 1995, was cool but still at our cabin in upstate New York, and we left our bedroom windows opened. [...] I had been sleeping lightly but peacefully when, at 3:15, I heard the distinctive sound of car tires crunching on our gravel driveway outside. (ch 18)

Thus determining when Strieber ‘lost’ the cabin is not simple. In *The Super Natural*, Strieber places the implant event five years earlier:

The next month, in May of 1989, I had an experience that completely changed my understanding of what was happening to me. [...] The event that took place on that night in May changed all this. At this moment, I reach up, I touch my left ear, and I feel, over a quarter of a century later, the same agonizing nakedness and vulnerability I felt when I first realized that it was there.

Late May of that year was warm, and we slept with the windows open. At about eleven thirty, Anne was asleep. [...]

It can truly be said that along with the other problems with Strieber, one of the most trying for his readers and, ultimately, for him is that he approaches his non-fiction like a fiction writer. Basic accuracy is routinely overcome by the need to tell a taut, encapsulated narrative. This combined with Strieber’s supreme mental flexibility, his ability to justify practically everything and to always invent plausible reasons, renders his work unworkable. In *Confirmation*, for example, the year given for the implant ordeal is not a simple typographical error. Strieber has a narrative built around it. The paragraph just prior:

Then an event took place that continues to haunt me. I have never recorded it before because it happened after *Breakthrough* was finished and there was no place for it in my book about childhood, *The Secret School*. But I have spoken about it in lec-

tures and have thought a great deal about it.

Consider: if the implant episode happened in 1989 as Strieber writes in *The Super Natural*, how could he write the above with such earnestness and human plausibility?

Confirmation was published in 1998. In it, Strieber is putting the implant episode at just three years before (perhaps even two years before if Strieber were writing in 1997). Yet it appears the event more likely took place nearly ten years before in 1989. One must eventually realize that Strieber's unending earnestness exists alongside a not particularly strong concern with the facts. And given that Strieber often insists he is drawing no conclusions from his experiences and is simply presenting them as experiences as accurately as he can, that they are presented with the same casual carelessness that others might present their own personal memories is quite incredible.

[65] **The Agony Column Podcast** with Rick Kleffel, "A 2012 Interview with Whitley Strieber", 12 Mar 2012 ~51:30:

What happened was this. *Communion* was initially was received very kindly by the public. They were very interested in it. But then, they expected an alien to land. I mean, they really did. Because people's imaginations and their ratiocination are not sophisticated. And they tend to be very passive and to wait for everything. And so, the result was when that didn't happen, they turned away and just lost interest in me. And a few books later, I was desperately trying to keep my head above water. Because you know, you stop selling books and eventually the publishers stop publishing you. And by the early nineties, after the book *Confirmation* failed — came out and had a dismal sale, I was unable to publish anything. And the result was, I lost essentially everything. I lost our house, I lost our apartment in New York. I lost it all. And ended up, in a car packed with luggage, with my wife heading back to San Antonio from whence I had arisen to a little condo that we owned that my mother had lived in before she died and we still were holding on to. That was where we ended up.

[66] As Strieber writes in *Solving the Communion Enigma*:

But now, as I turned down Route 209 for the last time, and that beloved spot, so sacred to me, slipped away behind us, I had to ask myself: Why had people stopped buying my books?

It was not my fault, I knew that, but that wasn't how it felt. [...] (ch 4)

Unable to entertain the idea that he might have done anything differently at any point, Strieber always places the blame everywhere else:

However, what happened to me stands as a most unusual human experience, and what has happened to all of us as a most valuable one. I got the feeling that there was marvelous knowledge being squandered by arrogant scientists, a frightened and secretive government, clownish media and a public led by all of the snickering and denial into a state of indifference.

Whitley's Journal, "The Grays", 27 Jul 2006
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/grays>

[67] One can choose a point at random on Strieber's website, look in any direction, and find him airing such grievances. During the 2004 US presidential election, for example, Strieber wrote a piece about a certain John O'Neill, who was at that time attacking candidate John Kerry. Strieber claimed to have known O'Neill, and in the middle of disputing O'Neills charges against Kerry, Strieber wrote:

This is probably why the visitors landed in my lap. Who or whatever they are, they knew that I would feel obligated to tell what I had seen and that, while I might not tell it right, at least I would never lie. Rather than keep that important event to myself and stay a part of the mainstream, I came forward with my truth and consigned myself to the margins of our intellectual and political life, an outsider, easily scorned and dismissed.

But I have at least retained my personal integrity, which I will die with. I would rather have that, any day, than any power earned by a lie.

What a damning testament it is against our decadent age that one of two old friends would come forward with what is probably one of the most important truths in the history of this species, and be marginalized for it and made a figure of fun, while the other comes forward with a lie and is made a hero for it, likely to be granted great power and heaped with honors.

Insight, “My High School Friend John O’Neill and the Swiftboat Attack”, 21 Aug 2004

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/insight/my-high-school-friend-john-oneill-and-swiftboat-attack>

The same goes for his interviews. In this **Glastonbury Podcast** interview from February 2011, Strieber says:

[~18:30] The established world does not want people like me to connect with anybody. They want me to be laughed off the stage of life and forgotten.

In his 2011 interview with George Knapp on **Coast to Coast AM**, Strieber said:

[~3:50] In general, I’m tuned out. I don’t exist. You’re not going to hear anything about Whitley Strieber in the *New York Times* or anywhere like that. [...] The average person no longer knows I even exist. (19 Jun 2011 hr 4)

Strieber talks of how he is regarded in this **Off Planet Radio** interview from 28 Mar 2012:

[~12:35] They hate me. They *hate* me. I’m like a viral particle.

Strieber’s feelings of victimization extend to what he calls “social engineering” or public campaigns against him:

Recently I have been thinking about social engineering and how it is used to discredit UFO and close encounter witnesses. I have been a major victim of this, of course, as the most visible advocate on behalf of the value of what the close encounter witnesses are reporting. [...]

Some of the attacks are not ‘natural’ social engineering. Some are very intentionally contrived. I am one of the victims of this, but hardly the only one. In 1998, for example, Parade Magazine published a false story about me to the effect that I had discovered that I had temporal lobe epilepsy and made a contribution to the epilepsy foundation. This story was published just before the release of my book Confirmation. At that time, Parade was still a major factor in the public forum.

I believe that the story was a lie, not a mistake. The reason for this is that, when I called Parade and talked to an editor, he told me that they had gotten it from a friend of mine in the Air Force. Confirmation is quite critical of the USAF’s role in the UFO controversy. Parade ran a retraction, but by then it was too late. The book had a disastrous sale.

I think that article was placed by professional social engineers who continue to play a huge role in the UFO community.

Whitley’s Journal, “Social Engineering and the Persecution of UFO and Close Encounter Witnesses”, 18 Apr 2013

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/social-engineering-and-persecution-ufo-and-close-encounter-witnesses>

And when typographical errors are found in Strieber’s books, Strieber suspects foul play, as in this ‘Live Chat’ on Strieber’s website dated 2 Sep 2006:

kl759: Loved the book. Stayed up until 4:00 in the morning reading it. Will there be a sequel? BTW, the typos were not a distraction. Your work shines through!

Whitley_Strieber: Thanks for your comment about the typos. As I corrected them all in my proofs, I assume that there was sabotage at the printers. Anybody involved in my stuff will take it on themselves to do harm. This is why so many Barnes and Nobles and Borders are not displaying the book. Clerks see the name and respond to a deep, unrecognized urge to not let this cat out of the bag. But if it doesn’t get out, we are going to lose

big time. Big, big time. The visitors are the only chance we have, scary though they may be.

http://www.unknowncountry.com/sites/default/files/subscribers/specialcollection/unknowncountry_chat_09_02_06.pdf

- [68] *Whitley's Journal*, "Ringling the Dreamland Changes", 18 Nov 2002
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/ringing-dreamland-changes>

On the question of Strieber's book sales, perhaps worth noting is what James Landis had to say in Conroy's *Report on Communion*. According to Conroy, Landis was the publisher who "personally handled the purchase of *Communion*" and who was "intimately involved with launching Strieber's literary career" (12). Asking Landis about the book sales of Strieber's *Transformation* in comparison to *Communion*, Landis said:

It's not selling as well, but it would have been an exception if it had. Whether it was a strict sequel or not, it's perceived as such, and the rule of thumb in publishing (which there will always be exceptions to) is that a sequel does about half of what the original does. (17)

One could easily see the natural tendency of sequels combined with Strieber's failure to produce the visitors as the main reason for his declining book sales.

- [69] *Whitley's Journal*, "The Anguish and Pain of My Rape", 5 Aug 2009
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/anguish-and-pain-my-rape>

- [70] **Paratopia** 91, "Whitley Strieber Returns", 18 Nov 2010 [~21:25]

- [71] **Coast to Coast AM** with Art Bell, "Alien Contact", 28 Nov 1996
 [~2:31:50] and [~2:34:25]

- [72] **Paratopia** 91 [~21:00]

- [73] **Night Fright**, 18 May 2011 [~6:00]

- [74] **The Unexplained** 196 [~35:45]

- [75] Sean Casteel, *UFO Magazine*, "Q&A: Strieber Sounds Off", Sept/Oct 1993, Vol. 8, No. 5 retrieved from beyondcommunion.com
- [76] The development of the rape-victim element of Strieber's narrative seems to start in 2003 when Strieber received an email from a reader saying that what Strieber described in *Communion*, which included rectal penetration, erection, and ejaculation, corresponded to a process in animal husbandry involving a device called an 'electroejaculator'. With a name finally put to the device, it seemed to solidify two things in Strieber's mind: the sexual aspect of the originally confusing, chaotic experience; and that he was a victim. Strieber announced his new conclusion in his *Journal* of 16 Oct 2003 entitled "A Personal Breakthrough: A Huge Question Answered".

The *Journal* entry shows quite clearly what was at stake for Strieber with this new 'discovery'. Much of the entry is a jeremiad against the abuse Strieber believes he suffered including rectal probe jokes, government interference, and his declining book sales. This is the context in which Strieber arrives at his new perspective on what happened in that episode. The entry marks a key point in Strieber's narrative where one can see a new personal 'truth' constructed and lock into place.

<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/personal-breakthrough-huge-question-answered>

Strieber's 'reasoning', of course, was something as follows: a) the rectal probe episode, its meaning could now be thought of as primarily sexual: the device had a name as a tool meant to elicit ejaculation; b) Strieber was a victim in general, victimized in so many other respects; c) therefore Strieber was now also a rape victim.

Rather than shy away from this new 'reality', Strieber sprang into action, incorporating it into his narrative while claiming the opposite: that it was a conclusion he had known about but avoided. Indeed, being strategic, Strieber appeared to announce on every interview that he had been 'raped', to two basic effects. It had the effect of disarming his audience unaccustomed to hearing a man so openly admit he was 'raped' and also of garnering sympathy. In this way, the new rape-victim element of Strieber's narrative was multi-purpose as by it he represented to himself a very personal

truth and at the same time advanced his public mission.

Consider also the narrative dimension in Strieber's description in *The Super Natural*:

Whatever happened to me on the night of December 26, 1985, there was enough physical trauma to send me to the doctor a few days later, who observed that I had been raped. Unfortunately for me, I was so humiliated by this that I described it in *Communion* — delicately, I thought — as a “rectal probe.” (ch 2)

Strieber attempts a similar maneuver in this interview (**Paratopia** 116), again saying that it had been rape to him all along:

[~10:10] I was literally raped. And it wasn't so easy to deal with this. Which is why in the book *Communion* I said simply, oh, I had a rectal probe. The result was I ended up getting laughed at up and down the creation for being raped, which is something you don't want to have happen to you It's very damaging to your well-being to be raped and to be humiliated and injured that badly and then just have everybody — just choruses of laughter. It was hard. It was my fault. Because I just didn't — I couldn't say it. And part of the reason I couldn't say it was that if I said it, then I'd have to face the element of absolute physicality that is connected with this experience.

It is obvious from Strieber's 2003 *Journal* entry and other writings that Strieber was not minimizing the rape aspect in *Communion*, “delicately” calling what was used on him a “rectal probe”. Rather, he only decided what happened to him was unambiguously a rape years later and read this and his own knowledge of the ‘fact’ retrospectively back into his narrative.

[76a] **The Agony Column Podcast** with Rick Kleffel, “A 2012 Interview with Whitley Strieber”, 12 Mar 2012 [~38:48]

[77] Posting to the forum at davidicke.com in 2014, a reader claims to have gotten his copy of *The Key* from a certain Larry Swearingen, a man convicted of murder in Texas and on death row. In the reader's post, he expresses his own doubts about the book:

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:1tJWY9K7ercJ:www.davidicke.com/forum/showthread.php>

[78] <https://web.archive.org/web/20120804045247/http://www.communionenigma.com/questions-answers/>

[79] Retrieved from beyondcommunion.com. Strieber wrote on the unknowncountry.com message board in 2004:

I'm working on fiction about the grays now. I've discovered that there's a LOT down inside me that comes slipping out when I am in the trance-like state that writing fiction involves. [...] I think you'll find it interesting. What I am after is getting my inner self to tell me what I really know about the grays, and keep hidden. There is no way to do this in nonfiction. But in a novel, it will come out. (5 Oct 2004)

The book about the Grays is an attempt to access meaning at a deeper level. I am hoping that facts will emerge through the fictional process. I am convinced that there is a lot I know — and everybody knows — that we cannot put into words. But MAYBE, if I write fiction about the grays, I will expose some of that hidden material that I know is there, but have never been able to say. (11 Oct 2004)

What are they, I wonder? At least, on the surface of my mind, I wonder. I'm hoping that the sort of incantational sense that comes from writing fiction — storytelling — will allow some of the hidden truth to emerge into the book. I think we all know what this is, every one of us, including the people who think that they have no connection with it, or who know nothing about it at all. The question is, where, in our inner beings, do we find the truth...and why have we hidden it from ourselves so totally? (10 Oct 2004)

Strieber also wrote on the communionenigma.com site:

Regarding fiction, I write a sort of 'secret fiction' that contains triggers that are designed to enhance memory. The books appear to be ordinary thrillers, but they have a sub-rosa mo-

tivation, which is to shake loose memories in my readers. To do this, I try to capture in the fiction the flavor of experiences that remain almost impossible to articulate. But if I can build imaginary worlds that cause a similar ‘flavor’ to emerge in the reader’s mind, then perhaps there will be an ‘aha’ moment, and another inward step taken in the journey to understanding.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120804045247/http://www.communionenigma.com/questions-answers/>

- [80] *Whitley’s Journal*, “The Grays”, 27 Jul 2006
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/grays>
- [81] Observation first made by Western Australia’s leading Strieber expert, B. MacGabhann
- [82] *Whitley’s Journal*, “Christmas Joy: Mankind is Awakening”, 14 Dec 2001
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/christmas-joy-mankind-awakening>
- [83] In *Transformation*, where the story first appears, and in *Break-through*, Strieber says that there was a tenth and final ‘double-knock’. But in most tellings, as for example in his 1987 *Angels*, *Aliens*, and *Archetypes* talk, he tells only of the nine knocks.
- [84] <http://www.unknowncountry.com/dreamland/spells-energies-and-dark-wisdom>
- [85] *Anne’s Diary*, “Anne’s Diary Starts Again”, 7 Dec 2016
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/diary/annes-diary-starts-again>
- [86] *Whitley’s Journal*, “The Unexpected Value of Fear in Deepening Close Encounter”, 16 Dec 2016
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/role-fear-deepening-close-encounter>

SI UNE REVUE SCIENTIFIQUE N’EXISTAIT PAS, IL FAUDRAIT L’INVENTER